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Our Church:

WHAT METHODISTS BELIEVE, AND
HOW THEY WORK.

BY

JESSE LYMAN HURLBUT, D. D.



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PREFATORY.

THIS book represents a work of preparation carried through many years. While in the pastorate, and later in the general work of the Church, I have in several places conducted classes of young people for instruction in the elements of Methodism as an institution. For these classes, held under different names, at different times, and in different localities, the contents of nearly all these papers were prepared in outline, and were given as addresses. When the Epworth League was organized, and the *Epworth Herald* was instituted as its organ, at the request of its editor, Dr. Joseph F. Berry, these informal talks were written as a series of articles. And now, again at the sugges-

tion of Dr. Berry, they have been revised, enlarged, and assimilated into this volume, which, it is hoped, may give to the young Methodists of the Epworth League a clearer conception of their own Church and its principles, and may promote a more complete consecration to the Church's Head whom we serve.

JESSE LYMAN HURLBUT.

MORRISTOWN, NEW JERSEY,
July, 1902.

OUR CHURCH:

WHAT METHODISTS BELIEVE, AND HOW THEY WORK.

I.

A FOREWORD TO THE YOUNG METH- ODIST.

THERE is standing in Copenhagen, Denmark, one of the twelve masterpieces of sculpture, the Christ by Thorwaldsen. Who that has ever looked upon that form, wherein strength and beauty are blended, upon that calm, benignant face, and upon those outspread hands, alive to the fingertips, will ever forget that almost matchless marble? It is said that once Thorwaldsen himself was found standing in front of this

statue with sorrowful face and tears falling from his eyes. They said to him:

“Why should you, of all men in the world, weep in the presence of this work by your own hand? Other sculptors might well weep, as they realize that they can not equal it. But why should you shed tears?”

“I weep,” said the great artist, “because it seems to me absolutely perfect. Hitherto I have felt that every statue that I have made was below my powers. I could see defects in them all, and believed that I could improve upon any one of them. But as I look at this I can see no flaw or imperfection in it. It comes fully up to the ideal of Christ that is in my own mind, and that feeling makes me sure that I shall never carve another statue to surpass it, or even to equal it. I weep because I have touched the top of my powers, and henceforth only a decline awaits me.”

It was even so. Though many statues

came from his chisel afterward, and some of them were high in their artistic rank, yet none of them could be compared to his Christ. That stands alone among his sculptures as Thorwaldsen's masterpiece.

You notice that the sculptor was leading, apparently, two distinct lives: the life of the *real*, that which he wrought, and the life of the *ideal*, the dream of perfection that was within his soul. We are all alike, though only a few men are great, and most of us are ordinary people. Every one of us, young and old, is leading these two distinct, yet inter-related lives. There is the life of the *real*—the things we do, the words we speak, the life we live; that life which we ourselves often feel is so poor, and narrow, and common; that life “the vulgar mass called work,” which others look upon and measure with “the world’s coarse thumb and finger,” as Browning says.

Why does this actual life of ours often

look to us so mean and small? It is because there is always moving on within us another life—the life of the ideal—that which we would be if we could. There rises before us the sculptor's dream of a noble life, what we would like to do and say. Rarely did artist paint a picture without having a finer painting in his soul that he vainly strove to image forth. Rarely did a minister preach a sermon so good that a better sermon was not struggling for utterance within him. To all noble natures there is an ideal which is the inspiration of the real.

But what has all this to do with the Epworth League and with the young people of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for whom these pages are written? Just this: That in the soul of every young Christian there is an ideal Christian life. In his highest moments it rises before him to inspire him; in his lowest moments it rises up to con-

demn him. Every one of us has his ideal; and while our actual living will never rise up to it—will always fall below it—yet it is well to have that ideal large, and clear, and strong, as a banner in the sky.

And now, in the first of these papers, let me give to every reader what I believe to be the true ideal for young Christians. It can be expressed in four words—spirituality, intelligence, loyalty, usefulness. If we could write one of these words upon each of the four arms of the Maltese cross that forms the badge of the Epworth League, they would together symbolize that completeness of Christian character toward which we are all aspiring.

Spirituality is the first great requisite, that fine spark of the divine life, kindled to a flame, which makes the true Christian different from other people. We need the kingdom of God within us, a consciousness

of sins forgiven, of peace with God, of the indwelling Spirit, of victory over the world, of salvation through Christ.

But besides this element of spirituality, we need *intelligence*. No doubt God can enter into a nature that is very ignorant. Mere knowledge can never save a soul; but in our faith we should have thoughtfulness and understanding. "Knowledge is power," and in this age of schoolhouses, and colleges, and newspapers, and books, and public libraries, the Church must lead the way. If the day shall come when the non-church-going people know more and read more widely, and have a greater mastery of the problems of the age than the Church members and the Church attendants, that will be a dark day for Christianity. The religion that has power to win the world and to lead the world must be an intelligent religion, and such a religion our young people desire to possess.

There is need, in our time, of *loyalty* in our Christianity. I do not refer to the sentiment of loyalty to the Nation, for there is little danger that loyalty of that kind will decline, since the very air of this continent seems to inspire it. But in this age we need to strengthen the bonds that unite us with the Church, and with our own Church in particular. These chapters are written for the young people of the Methodist Episcopal Church. I would write as strongly if I were addressing Baptists, or Protestant Episcopalians, or Presbyterians, or Congregationalists, urging them to understand the system of their Church, to love their Church, and to be faithful to its obligations. But there is a special reason for an appeal to young Methodist Episcopalians in the fact that our Church is in many respects unlike all other Churches. There are no bishops like our bishops, no machinery of the same pattern as our own, no gathering in all the world

like a General Conference or an Annual Conference, no book of Discipline that reads as ours. And the young people of Methodism who know the most about their own Church do not love the other Churches less, but do love their own Church more. We would have in our ideal for our own young people a thorough knowledge of Methodism—how it arose, how it grew, the romance of its history, the simplicity and common sense of its doctrines, and the adaptation of its unique system to its great aim of winning the world to Christ.

And to all this should be added the ideal of *usefulness*—a working Christianity—not the Christianity that sits in a chamber and reads Thomas à Kempis, or John Wesley's Journal, or the History of Methodism, and then says its prayers and goes to sleep, but the Christianity that, feeling the fire within, goes out to kindle the same fire in another soul; the Christianity that is in its seat at

church on Sunday morning, and drops its share into the plate, and stays awake during the sermon; the Christianity that attends, not only the Epworth League meeting, but the Church prayer-meeting also, and has a prayer and a testimony in both; the Christianity that takes a class in the Sunday-school, and takes a hand in the Mercy and Help Department, and stands up beside the president and the pastor in the work of the Church; the Christianity that lays upon the altar of the Church its service as well as its faith.

If we can blend into one composite photograph these four qualities of the spiritual life, the intelligent mind, the loyal heart, and the working hand, and make that the portrait of the Epworth Leaguer, then ours will be indeed an ideal Christianity.

II.

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH.

“I BELIEVE in the holy catholic Church,” was said last Sunday morning by at least a million people in the United States of America, of whom perhaps three hundred thousand were members of our Church. If all our Churches were following the order of service recommended by the General Conference and given in the Discipline, a million members of our Church, assembled in their houses of worship, would have uttered these words, “I believe in the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints.”

I once heard of a little girl who persisted in giving, as her statement of this sentence in the creed, “I believe in the Holy Meth-

odist Church," and she gave for a reason, "I do n't believe in the Catholic Church, and I do believe in the Methodist Church."

But there is a vast difference between the *Roman* Catholic Church and the *holy catholic* Church. The word *catholic* means "general," "universal," as the footnote to the Creed informs us, and the holy catholic Church is the general body of believers in Jesus Christ, found in all Churches. Whoever believes in Jesus Christ with all his heart, submits his will to Christ, strives to follow him, and shares in the life of his Spirit, is a member of the holy catholic Church. He may also belong to the Methodist Episcopal Church, or to the Baptist, or to the Presbyterian, or to the Protestant Episcopal, or to the Roman Catholic Church; but it is not his membership in any one of these Churches which brings him into living union with Christ. It is his relation to the holy catholic Church, "the general

assembly and Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.”

Some good people hesitate to use the term “the holy catholic Church,” thinking that it smacks too strongly of “Romanism,” or of Romanism’s next-door neighbor, with an open door between them—“high Churchism.” But it is a good expression; it has a definite meaning; it is needed; it stands in the Apostles’ Creed, the common platform of all the Churches; and it gives to the Church which can by common consent obtain the exclusive right to use it, a mighty power. Witness the effort which has been made for years in one of the smaller denominations to change its name to that of “The American Catholic Church.” John Wesley said that he saw no reason why the devil should have all the best music, and we see no reason why any one Church should have the prestige of the name “The holy

catholic Church." It belongs to us all; let us all claim our share in it.

This holy catholic Church is often and rightly called "the invisible Church," because, while it is a real body, it has nothing that can be seen by the bodily eye. There is no cathedral-spire in the world to which one can point, saying, "That is the building of the holy catholic Church," for its members meet and worship in all church edifices. There is no form of Church government of which it can be said, "These are the orders of clergy and laity in the holy catholic Church," for it may exist under the forms of bishops and priests, or of elders and presbyteries, or of Conferences, or of independent societies; for in reality it is apart from all forms of organization; it is a fellowship of souls, united in Christ, out of all the organized Churches. There are no "Articles of Religion," or any "confession of

faith," or "catechism," of which any one has a right to say, "Here are the doctrines of the holy catholic Church set down in cold type to be read;" for those who belong to this Church do not always think and believe the same thing.

I met a man who said to me: "There are nine hundred and eleven different kinds of religion in the world. I have examined them all, and find that every one of them holds some beliefs that are true, and some others that are false. If I had the time, I could make a statement of the truth concerning religion; but it would do no good, for people would still go on believing their own false opinions."

That man believed that he knew what was the true doctrine of the holy catholic Church, and he was not the first man to believe and to claim such infallibility. The pope of Rome claims it, and so, I think, does a certain Dr. Dowie, in Chicago, who dresses

himself in a robe, and calls himself "the re-incarnation of the Prophet Elijah;" and, as I am informed, does a Mrs. Eddy, of Concord, Mass., who has published "A Key to the Holy Scriptures," telling those who think they understand her mystic—or, rather, *misty*—sentences, just what the Bible means. In fact, almost every little set of separatists begins by proclaiming its crowd "the true Church of Christ," and unchurching everybody else. But the holy catholic Church shows its breadth by taking into its embrace even some of these narrow-minded, intolerant bigots, because, amid all their errors, they still love the Lord Jesus, and try, in their small way, to serve him.

There is no book of discipline of which we have a right to say, "These are the rules and regulations of the holy catholic Church duly set forth, paragraphed, and indexed." They may say, "We believe that disciples of Christ need guidance, and admonition,

and restriction, and we think that these regulations will help to keep those who follow them in the way of life;" but they have no authority to limit the work of the Spirit and to claim infallibility in knowledge of duty.

The holy catholic Church is the one apostolic Church, and the only apostolic Church, which has been in the world ever since the Holy Spirit descended upon the day of Pentecost. Its true succession is not perpetuated in any formal organization, but in the generations of earnest souls, vitally united to Jesus Christ, who have lived in the world since Christ ascended to heaven.

These believers in Jesus Christ are organized under various forms, none of which have any divine, exclusive right, but many of which can show good reasons for their existence. The truth of God is larger than the ideas of any one mind, or of any one society, and for its complete expression

needs many bodies. Each body is "a Church," and if it can show sufficient reason, has a right to be considered a Church. But no one body has a right to arrogate to itself the title, "The Church," as if it were the only Church on the earth.

"The holy catholic Church," then, is the one body of believers in Jesus Christ, the kingdom of Christ on earth, and "the Churches" are the organized forms under which Christ's followers are marshaled. The holy catholic Church consists mainly, but not wholly, of the members of "the Churches;" for there are doubtless many true followers of Christ who are not attached to any organization. And, on the other hand, "the Churches" consist mainly, but not wholly, of Christ's true followers; for there are doubtless many names enrolled upon the lists of the organized Churches which are not written in the book of life.

We may represent "the Church" and "the

Churches" by two circles of the same size, each crossing the other, and each including perhaps two-thirds of the other. There will be a part of each circle which is inside the other, and common to both, and there will also be a part of each circle which is outside the other. That middle segment, which belongs to both circles, will represent those members who belong at once to the invisible holy catholic Church, and to some one of the organized Churches. One of the outside sections will represent those who belong to Christ and to *his* Church, but do not belong to any of "the Churches," and the other will represent the professing Church members who do not possess Christ. None but the All-wise Head of the Church knows precisely what are the relative proportions of these three segments, or what names belong to them.

Let every member of the Epworth League

make sure his own place in the inner orb, which represents at once his membership in the earthly Church and the heavenly. One of these Churches may be of great help to us all, but the other is absolutely essential to our salvation.

III.

OUR PLACE AMONG THE CHURCHES.

IT is customary for the newspapers and for some public speakers to refer to the different denominations of Christians as if they were armies drawn up in battle array against each other, and spending upon one another the energies that ought to be turned against sin and Satan. Occasionally some clergyman of one of the smaller sects will lift up his voice against "the divisions of Christianity" and in behalf of "the seamless robe of Christ," which always means his Church. He will perhaps suggest that if all will unite on his little platform the great wound of the Church will be healed.

In reality, the different Churches of our time are not armies at war. They are the

different army corps of one great host. Undoubtedly there have been ages of strife between denominations, and two generations ago preachers spent much strength in controversy. I remember, in my boyhood, an aged local preacher, a survival of an earlier generation, who, in his sermon, whatever the text or the theme might be, was always sure to give a whack at "the apostolical succession" and "the five pints of Calvinism." What the apostolical succession was, and why Calvinism did not possess an even two quarts instead of "five pints," I did not fully understand. But even then, in the fifties, discourses of a combative sort were quite infrequent; and no one ever hears them now, unless in very remote places, where the railroad has not brought modern ideas, and where the people are still voting for General Jackson. In our time there is a comfortable state of peace among the Churches.

To choose a more peaceful and better

Churches hold the same belief; but one is organized according to a plan which brings every local Church under the joint control of all the Churches of the same order, collectively, while the other leaves each local Church to manage its own affairs.

There are Churches which have the same doctrine, but not the same spirit, as the Methodist and Moravian. The Congregational and Baptist Churches are precisely alike in their method or form of organization, for in both bodies each local Church is a law unto itself; but they differ widely in both doctrine and spirit. On the contrary, the Baptists and the Methodists, though wide apart in both doctrine and method, are remarkably alike in their spirit.

In doctrine, the Churches may be lined up either on the Calvinistic or the Arminian side in their views of God's government. Both these names are taken from those of great opposing leaders of thought in the six-

teenth century, John Calvin, of Geneva, and James Arminius, of Holland. The Calvinists lay stress on the sovereignty of God, as having ordained or decreed all things that come to pass, while Arminians emphasize the freedom of man's will. The Presbyterians, the Dutch Reformed, the Baptist, and the Congregational Churches are all Calvinistic, while the Methodists are Arminian.

There are three methods of Church government: the congregational, in which each society is independent of all others, and recognizes no authority higher than its own membership; the presbyterian, in which the Churches are associated and controlled by a governing body, yet recognizing no ministers of higher rank and authority than the pastors of Churches; and the episcopal, which allows the rule of chief pastors, or superintendents, who are called *bishops*.

Of these three forms, our Church is episcopalian, for we have bishops. Yet we

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do not regard our bishops as a higher order than other ministers, as the Protestant Episcopalians do. Ours might be regarded as a sort of Presbyterian-Episcopalianism, for we consider our bishops as presbyters, or elders, holding an office, and not as belonging to a separate order in the ministry.

In former times, Methodism was distinguished from other Churches no less by its spirit than by its doctrines and methods. A peculiar fervor, enthusiasm, and vigor characterized all the exercises of our Church. One would at once recognize a Methodist meeting by the energy with which the preaching, singing, prayer, and testimony were carried on. "All at it, and always at it," was the motto of John Wesley and the practice of the early Methodists. "Methodism is Christianity in earnest," said Thomas Chalmers, the great Scottish preacher. To some extent this trait is still prominent; but we have toned down and our fellow-Christians

of the other Churches have toned up, and in spirit the evangelical Churches are nearer alike than formerly. But even now a Methodist prayer-meeting, whether in New England, or Ohio, or Oregon, has generally a distinct flavor which will be found in no other Church.

To sum up: Methodism is Arminian in its doctrine, episcopal in its method, and fervent in its spirit, and with these traits it holds a recognized and useful place in the communion of the Churches.

President Lincoln closed a brief address to a deputation which gave him the loyal greeting of our Church, in these words, which were worthy of the man, and fitting words for us all: "God bless the Methodist Church; God bless all the Churches; and blessed be God, who giveth us the Churches!"

IV.

THE METHODIST FAMILY.

THERE are Churches, as there are families, which lay great stress upon their antiquity. If an Englishman can point to an ancestor who "came over with the conqueror," and had his name in the Domesday Book, he holds his head a little higher than his neighbor, whose family line can not be traced above the eighteenth century. So some Churches claim an uninterrupted succession of prelates from the times of Henry VIII, or of Saxon Egbert, or of the Emperor Constantine.

Methodism makes no claim of precedence among the Churches by reason of its age. Although the principles upon which it is founded are as old as the New Testament,

and its spiritual life is in the genuine apostolical succession, yet as a distinct organization it is less than one hundred and fifty years old. It is the greatest in membership of all the Protestant families; but it is also the youngest, for when John Wesley organized his first Society, in 1739, the Church of England, apart from Rome, had been established for two hundred years, the Presbyterian Church, which is of Scottish origin, had been at work for one hundred and seventy years, the Congregationalist Churches for one hundred and forty years, and the Baptist Churches for one hundred and thirty years. All the great Churches of our time had the start of Methodism from one hundred to two hundred years. Yet out of the "handful of corn" planted in 1739 there has grown a harvest of souls far greater than that garnered in any other Church.

Another noticeable fact in the growth of Methodism is that it has sprung from one

man. Protestant Episcopalians would not admit that Henry VIII was the father of their Church, though he might be regarded as a rather harsh foster-father. All the Presbyterians are not spiritual descendants of John Knox, nor are the Congregationalists altogether sprung from John Robinson, nor the Baptists from John Smyth. These men were Church founders, but none of them were Church fathers. But the first class-meeting of John Wesley consisted of people whose spiritual life had been awakened by his teaching. They were his "converts," for he had led them to Christ. And all the millions of people who have been brought into the Methodist Churches in England, in America, in Australasia, in the isles of the sea, and in the mission-fields, are in the direct spiritual succession from John Wesley. Methodism owes to other Churches a smaller number of its members than its sister denominations owe to Methodism. It

has received few, but it has given many. For one member who has come to us from other Churches we have sent ten as our contribution to our sister denominations. But, notwithstanding our youth, notwithstanding our large gifts of members to other Churches, ours is the largest body of believers in the Anglo-Saxon Protestant world. There are in all, according to the latest statistics, not less than seven millions of members in the various branches of Methodism throughout the lands. If we counted as members all those baptized in childhood, as some other Churches count theirs, the total of Methodist population in the world would be at least fifteen millions. All this vast multitude has grown out of the work of one man, and all in one hundred and sixty years. Truly may we say, "What hath God wrought!"

Although these millions, be they six or fifteen, are not gathered within the doors

of one Church, they are in what might be called the Methodist family of Churches, a group of denominations of common origin, uniform belief, similar systems of organization, and, whatever may be said of the past, now living together in amity. There are in England and her sister isles seven denominations regarding themselves as Methodists; and in the United States there are seventeen.

Methodism might be likened to the banyan-tree of India, whereon the limbs growing out from a central trunk drop down shoots which take root in the earth, so that in time one tree becomes a forest, knitted together by branches above and by interlacing roots below. The original stock, planted all unconsciously by John Wesley—for at the time he did not dream that he was founding a Church—was known first as “the United Societies,” then as “the Wesleyan Methodist Society,” and now as “the Wes-

leyan Methodist Church." It includes about 720,000 members at home and in its mission-fields. From it have grown eight or nine independent branches in Great Britain and her colonies, with nearly 700,000 members.

Whether the banyan-tree of India ever puts forth branches larger than its trunk I know not; but the tree of Methodism has reached across the ocean and planted shoots on this continent which are far greater than its original English stock. There is the Methodist Episcopal Church, begun in 1766, and organized as a Church in 1784, now embracing 2,948,137 members (nearly three millions), according to that useful little pamphlet, which should be in the hand of every young member, "The Methodist Year-book" of 1902. Next comes the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which in 1901 had 1,470,520 members. Then follow two Churches composed of Americans of African descent, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, of

675,462 members, and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion, with 536,271 members. Our brethren in black have divided and subdivided and grown until they have eight or nine organizations for their sixteen hundred thousand members.

With regard to these shoots from the family tree, one remarkable fact should be noted: Independent as they are of each other, they all hold to the same doctrines, they are all organized upon the same general plan, and they all share in the same spirit. Many as are the divisions of Methodism, not one has ever been made upon doctrinal grounds. Some have been caused by location, as the Churches of Canada, of Australia, and the organization of our own Church in 1784, some were engendered through the strife of politics in the days of the slavery agitation, which set off the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, from the parent body; some have been caused by dif-

ferences of opinion with regard to the government of the Church, as when the Methodist Protestant Church withdrew on account of its opposition to the episcopacy, and started its own Church without bishops.

Some of these divisions were made in peace, while others were attended with hard feelings and harsh words; but all enmity between the different branches of the family has long ago passed away. We are all brothers now, sending to each other fraternal delegates, meeting together in "Preachers' Meetings," and working together in revivals. Once in ten years a great "Ecumenical Conference" is held, of representatives from every branch of Methodism in all lands, of all colors, and of every plan of organization. This gathering of a world-wide Methodism has no authority over the Churches to which its several members belong, but it illustrates the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace which each branch of

the great Methodist tree cherishes toward all the other branches.

We may justly claim, as a family, to exemplify the three great principles asserted by our founder: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

V.

THE METHODIST SYSTEM.

THERE is a word often seen in Methodist literature and often spoken in the debates at Methodist Conferences. It is the word "connectional." We call ours "a connectional Church;" we appeal to "the connectional spirit." By this we mean the strong bond which unites each member, not merely to his own local Church, but to the *whole* Church; that bond which combines all parts of the Church into one solid institution. Let us look at the links which constitute this chain.

Its unit is the individual member. According to the plan of Methodism, he belongs to a class and is under the care of a leader. His class is not a confessional, and

his leader is not a priest; but in the class-meeting a little band of Christians are united to help each other in the life of godliness, and the leader is a subpastor. In the early days the leader was a necessity, for the pastor was an "itinerant," traveling a "circuit," and coming to each appointment only once in a fortnight, or even only once in a month. During the intervals of pastoral visitation each leader watched over his little flock, met all the members in the weekly class-meeting, listened to the story of their experience, counseled them according to their needs, received and kept account of their contributions to the Church, and held them all in close relation to the body of believers. There are thousands of charges where the class system is still maintained, notably in England and in Canada, where every member of the Methodist Church is a member of a class. But in many sections it has been suffered to lapse, and the Church feels the

need of it in the lack of discipline. Nevertheless, this generation of Methodists, even though it does not attend class as its fathers did, inherits a certain *esprit de corps* which is the result of the old system.

A number of these classes are united to form what the Discipline, or Book of Rules, of our Church calls "a charge" or "an appointment," by which is meant the local Church. This local Church is supervised by a pastor and three different boards—the leaders, the stewards, and the trustees. The leaders watch over the religious interests of the Church members, all of whom they are supposed to know; the stewards care for the business of the Church as a Society, and see that the pastor is supported; and the trustees are the legal corporation holding the property in trust. Often these three boards are united into one body, called "the Official Board," consisting of all the leaders, stewards, and trustees, the superintendent of

the Sunday-school, the president of the Epworth League, and any local preachers in the local membership. And once in three months all these official members constitute the Quarterly Conference, at which the presiding elder is chairman, and all the work of the Church in every department is thoroughly canvassed. This Quarterly Conference, which no person except the presiding elder can call together, is the highest authority in the local Church, and supervises every worker and all his work.

A number of contiguous and accessible charges or appointments are united to form a district, which is generally named after its largest city or town, as "the Newark District," "the Springfield District," "the Booneville District," etc. Over these is placed a presiding elder, appointed by the bishop. The presiding elder travels through his district, which may include twenty, thirty, or forty Churches. He

preaches as often as four times each year in all the pulpits, not as a visitor by invitation, but as "the officer of the day," on a date fixed by himself. He holds the Quarterly Conferences, looks into the affairs of each Church, sees where the work can be strengthened, provides for new openings, and takes charge or sends his representative if at any time the pulpit of a Church becomes vacant. The presiding elder is the supervisory link between the "preacher in charge" and the bishop.

A number of these districts are united to form an Annual Conference. There may be, in a sparsely-settled State or Territory, a Conference of but one District, and twenty preachers; or the Conference may have eight or nine districts, and nearly three hundred preachers. The Annual Conference is made up of the ministers, and, as its name indicates, it is held every year, lasting nearly a week. Here the work of all the Churches is re-

viewed, reported upon, and approved or censured as the conditions may require, in a series of questions provided by the law of the Church, and asked by the presiding officer. And this presiding officer is not chosen by the Annual Conference itself. He is a subbishop, outside of the Conference's jurisdiction, and amenable to a higher power. Thus his supervision is not in danger of being influenced by the votes of the ministers in the Conference.

That "higher power" is the General Conference, which is at once the Supreme Court, the Congress, and the Executive of the Church. It is the only body that makes laws for the Church, that interprets those laws, and that chooses the bishops who are to enforce them. Under the auspices of the General Conference, all the work of the Annual Conferences is reviewed, and the entire machinery of the Church is controlled. Even the bishops, who have vast powers elsewhere,

are the servants of the General Conference, whose arms reach around the world. This is the last link in the chain of supervision which makes ours "a connectional Church."

The Methodist Episcopal system might be represented by a pyramid. On the top stands a stone which represents the individual member; under it lies a larger block, the class with its leader; below this is one still larger, the local Church, or "charge," having its pastor and Quarterly Conference; under the Church is a lower and larger course, the district, with its presiding elder; still lower down is the Annual Conference, and its presiding bishop; and, as the basis of all and supporting all, is the General Conference, which represents and controls the entire body of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

If anybody wishes to serve the Lord according to his own will, to fight "on his own hook," as did white-hatted John Burns at Gettysburg, according to the poet's story,

the Methodist Episcopal Church is no place for him. He will form an independent Church of one member, and perhaps he may do some good on earth, and may find his way to heaven; but he is not the kind of man needed in our Church.

A clergyman who had left our Church for another where he might be "free," objected to a confession of faith in his new surroundings, saying that he "had taken his neck out of one ecclesiastical collar, and was not going to put it into another." This is all very well if one is to be a wild ass in the wilderness; but if he purposes to pull a load, he must put himself into some sort of a harness. The system of the Methodist Episcopal Church is admirably adapted to members and ministers who are willing to bear burdens, to bring things to pass, to build up others, and to be built up themselves.

VI.

THE FAITH OF OUR FATHERS.

ON Saturday, June 5, 1742, the Rev. John Wesley, thirty-nine years old, and the most widely-known clergyman in England, came to Epworth, his birthplace, the village where his father had been rector of the Church for forty years, and where John Wesley had been his father's assistant for two years. He staid at the village inn, and the next day, Sunday, June 6th, at six o'clock in the evening, stood on his father's tomb, beside the east door of the Church, and preached to such a congregation as Epworth had never seen before.

But why should John Wesley use his father's grave as a pulpit? Was it because the congregation was so great that the little

church could not contain it; or was it an affectation, an effort to attract attention by preaching in an unusual place? It was simply because the Rev. John Wesley, Master of Arts and Fellow of Lincoln College, an ordained clergyman of the Church of England, was regarded by most of his fellow-clergyman, including the Rev. Mr. Romley, the then curate of Epworth, as a dangerous heretic, and as a heretic he had been shut out of all except half a dozen pulpits in England.

He had presented himself to the curate at the hour of worship, robed as a clergyman, and had offered to assist in the service. But he had been denied any recognition, and had heard a pointed sermon from the curate on the dangers of enthusiasm in religion. As the congregation passed out, a friend of Mr. Wesley announced at the church-door, "Mr. Wesley, not being permitted to preach in the church, designs to preach here at six o'clock."

And he did preach, standing outside the church-door, on his father's tomb, from the text, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

What was that terrible heresy which John Wesley believed and proclaimed, and which caused nearly all the church-doors of England to be closed against him? It was his firm conviction of four doctrines, which he held with all his heart and preached with all his might. Those doctrines were the following:

First. *That all men may be saved*; that Jesus Christ died, not for a chosen and elect few, who had been appointed to be saved, while the mass of mankind had been left to perish. This is the doctrine of universal redemption.

Secondly. *That every soul makes his own choice* for salvation or for condemnation; that we are not machines, predestined to run

a certain course, and doing only what fate has ordained us to do, but that each one of us stands within a circle of personal choice, and decides for himself whether to accept Christ or to reject him. This is the doctrine of the freedom of the will.

Thirdly. That a soul which has been forgiven of its sins, has entered into peace with God, and is accepted in Christ as a child of God, *may possess, also, the assurance of his salvation* stamped upon his own consciousness; that no one need remain in doubt whether he is saved or not. This is the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit.

Fourthly. That it is the privilege of every follower of Christ to be made perfect in love toward God and man, to serve God with all his heart, and to obtain complete victory over sin. This is the doctrine of entire sanctification.

These four doctrines, the universality of redemption, the freedom of the will, the wit-

ness of the Spirit, and entire sanctification, are the four fundamental articles in the faith of our fathers, as preached by John Wesley, as accepted and experienced by his followers, the early Methodists, and as attested by every generation of Methodist preachers and Methodist people, without material change, from the opening page of Methodist history until the present day.

Not one of these great truths was a living article of faith when John Wesley began to proclaim them. They were combated by theologians, they were branded as fanatical and heretical by the clergy, high and low, and they were ignored in the religious life of the nation.

Susannah Wesley, the mother of John Wesley (a woman whom Adam Clarke, the commentator, declared to be the highest modern example of "the excellent woman" described in the last chapter of Proverbs), told her son that in all her life, as the daughter of

one clergyman and the wife of another, she had never heard a sermon on "the witness of the Spirit," and had known only a very few people who claimed to enjoy it.

But when Wesley out of his own experience began to preach these truths, there was an instant response to them in the heart of the people. Everywhere the religious spirit began to awake; societies were formed of believers who accepted and enjoyed this type of Christianity, and realized its power in their own consciousness. During his long life, in a ministry of more than fifty years after "his heart was strangely warmed" in 1738, John Wesley preached fourteen thousand sermons, and every sermon was a setting forth of the privilege to a salvation *for all*, a *free* salvation, a salvation *felt*, and a *full* salvation. And he lived long enough to find these doctrines anchored in the heart of the Church and accepted by Christians of every creed; long enough to be welcomed in all

the pulpits of England as an apostle of the true faith; long enough even to record in his Journal, though late in life, that he had a delightful season of communion with that same Rev. Mr. Romley, curate of Epworth.

These four doctrines, the universality of salvation, the freedom of the will, the witness of the Spirit, and entire sanctification, are the distinctive doctrines of Methodism throughout the world. None the less are they our peculiar heritage, because they have triumphed over opposition, and are now the accepted faith of all evangelical Churches. They are in the hymnals, in the sermons, in the prayer-meetings, in the testimonies of the entire Anglo-Saxon Protestant world. But while other Churches have slowly changed their attitude toward these doctrines, from opposition to acceptance, have gradually adopted them in their preaching and their experience, and are even now trying the hard task of reconciling with them

their ancient hard and fast "confessions of faith," our Church, on both sides of the sea, has held these doctrines continuously, and preaches them, unchanged, to-day; for the faith of our fathers is still the faith of their sons.

VII.

THE PORCH OF PROBATION.

THERE is one peculiar plan of the Methodist Episcopal Church with which every new member comes into relation immediately upon his profession of faith in Christ. Unlike all the other Christian bodies, we do not receive the new disciple of Christ at once into full fellowship. He must stand for six months in the porch of the temple as "a probationer" before the door is opened for him to enter into complete membership.

(The probationer is a person who is neither quite in the Church, nor altogether outside of it. He is standing in the vestibule, with the outer door shutting him out from the world, and the inner door not yet opened to admit him into the Church. He is "on

trial" in two ways; for he is holding the Church on trial until he can ascertain to a certainty whether he believes in its doctrines, is satisfied with its system, and is at home with its spirit; and the Church is holding him on trial until he shall, by continuance in well-doing, show himself worthy of membership. In his period of probation he may find, upon closer acquaintance, that the Church holds views which he can not accept, or requires standards of conduct which he is unwilling to adopt. And, on the other hand, six months may show that the man is not a true disciple of Christ, that instead of being converted in heart, he has been only moved in his emotions, and that he has no true affiliation with the people of God.

The probationer is a twig grafted on the tree of the Church. If it has life, the twig and the tree soon become one, and each adds something to the other—the tree is richer by the life of the twig, and the twig is

stronger by the life of the tree. But if it be a dead branch, there is no true union; it soon drops off and falls to the ground; or, if it be merely tied on from the outside it must be untied and taken away.

Apparently the probationary system is peculiar to Methodism. No other Church in its rules requires a period of several months' waiting at the door before membership. Yet practically the same plan prevails among all the denominations. In some, those who are under consideration for membership are organized into "confirmation classes" until trained for the vows of the Church. In other folds there is either a voluntary delay on the part of the newly-converted person in making application for membership, or else he is allowed to wait until his resolution has become fixed or his change of character is evident. It will be found, upon inquiry, that the period of waiting outside the doors of other Churches is

nearly or quite as long as the period of probation in our own. And with others, this is literally "outside the Church," without its care, its obligations, its sacraments, or its privileges. But among us, while technically a period of waiting, it is in reality a period of nurture and training and supervision, preparing the candidate for the vows which are yet to be assumed.

All that is required of a person in order to become a probationer is "a desire to flee from the wrath to come and to be saved from his sins." He is not required to have been converted, to have a conscious experience of his own salvation, or to have any knowledge of the Church, its doctrines, or its organization, or its regulations. He may be an inquirer, not yet consciously converted, or he may have been converted five minutes before joining on probation. Instances are on record of men who came to a revival-meeting open enemies of the gospel,

and left it members of the Church on probation, having passed through the stages of sin, conviction, repentance, faith, and assurance of pardon all within an hour.

But as soon as the young Christian is received upon probation he finds that his privileges and his obligations begin. If not already sure that he is forgiven and accepted as a child of God, he must seek at once the witness of the Spirit to his salvation; he must begin at once to show the fruits of grace in his daily living, to renounce the wrong and to do the right; he should attend the public means of grace, the worship on the Lord's-day, the prayer-meeting, and the class-meeting; he should take part in the Epworth League, both by his presence and his testimony; he should observe private prayer, and should read daily the Word of God; he should acquaint himself with the Discipline of the Church, that he may know just what it believes and just how it is or-

ganized; he must receive the seal of baptism, if he has not received it before, and after that take the pledge of fidelity to Christ in the holy communion. His six months of probation are not to be passed in waiting for a door to open, but in preparing himself worthily to enter that door into the holy fellowship beyond it.

Let the young probationer remember that habit soon crystallizes into character, and let him therefore form good habits that will harden into a strong, noble character; let him, in the earliest days of his probationary period, ask himself: "What kind of a Christian should I aim to be? a worker or an idler? a witness or a silent, dumb member? one rich in spiritual life, or one living at a poor, dying rate?" Six months will generally fix the traits of a Church member for a lifetime. If during his probation he does not learn to bear testimony, it is more than likely that his tongue will cleave to the roof

of his mouth for the rest of his days. If he does not open his little purse then, he will be likely not to draw on his big bank account later for the help of the gospel. Those six months are great with destiny. What he will be in the Church at the end of forty years shows itself in those early days. Let him set his ideals high, and press onward and upward to realize them.

We are not to forget that the probationer has all the important privileges of the full member. He can enjoy all the benefits of every service in the Church; he can render his testimony and offer his prayer, and both these things he should do. All that Christian fellowship offers to the member, in the same measure it extends to the probationer.

There are only three rights which the member possesses above the probationer: His name is written upon the roll of membership; he can vote in an election of the Church, an event, however, which is rare;

and he can not be put out of Church membership, against his will, except by trial. For these rights of membership the probationer must wait six months, to show himself worthy of them.

It has sometimes been said that "the Methodists make their converts wait out of doors in the cold for six months before they open the Church to them." The illustration is not correct. On the contrary, they open the door, and give to the new convert a hearty welcome, and make room for him in the chimney-corner, close to the fire, until such a time as he shall be ready for adoption into the family.

At the close of the probationary period the names of those on trial are canvassed by the pastor and class-leaders, or in the presence of the Official Board. Those that are deemed worthy of full membership are approved, and are notified to be present on the day of reception; those that are doubtful

are left upon probation; and those that are unfit to be in the Church are quietly dropped from the roll of probationers. Thus the Church-register is kept free at the outset from unworthy names, and some are kept out whom it might be desirable yet difficult to remove when once admitted.

We see, then, that among the benefits of the probationary system are these: It enables the Church to take advantage of the convert's early enthusiasm for Christ, and to bring him at once into association with God's people; it gives the young Christian the opportunity of careful preparation for the vows of membership, not outside of but under the Church's care; it prevents the accumulation upon the roll of the Church of those who have a name to live, yet are dead; and it brings into the Church, not untrained and raw recruits, but disciplined members who have shown themselves fit for the fellowship of God's people.

VIII.

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

IN that unique and fascinating work, the Journal of John Wesley, under date of Wednesday, May 24, 1738, a day that might well be celebrated as the birthday of Methodism, occurs this entry:

“In the evening I went very unwillingly to a Society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed; I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.”

To many that may not appear a remarkable statement, for in our time such an experience as is here narrated is common among Christians. We have seen the glow upon the countenance of one, kneeling at the altar, when the hand of faith grasps Christ, and sorrow is turned into joy. We have heard the testimonies of those who could tell just the day and the hour when the peace of God entered into their hearts.

I was one day with one of the bishops of our Church, when we came to a white birch-tree, standing by the roadside, clad in its snow-white sheen. The bishop stopped in front of it, and said: "I love a white birch-tree. It is to me always beautiful. But I love it most of all because while I was under a white birch-tree God spoke peace to my soul."

But widespread as this experience is in our time, it was so rare in John Wesley's earlier ministry as to be practically unknown, and,

being unknown, was not regarded as a possibility. The assertion that the disciple of Christ may enjoy the consciousness of forgiven sin and acceptance with God was received as a new and a strange doctrine, to be met with incredulity, with denial, and with bitter opposition.

For at least a century before Wesley's day no authority in the Church of England had ventured to affirm that a Christian had a right to be sure of his salvation. One may search shelf after shelf of printed sermons by eminent ministers in the first half of the eighteenth century without finding a solitary allusion to religion as an experience in the heart.

How did John Wesley come to the knowledge of this assurance of faith? He had been for years a seeker after God, but living rather as a slave than a son. While on his voyage to Georgia, to which Colony he went as a missionary in 1735, his ship was over-

taken by a storm, in which every passenger looked for immediate death. Wesley felt that he was unfit to die, because he was unwilling; but he found on board a company of Germans from Moravia, the followers of a Count Zinzendorf, whose calmness and peace amazed him; and after the storm, in conversation with them, he learned for the first time what the peace of God and the witness of the Spirit meant. From that day he sought it as an experience, but not until two years and a half later, after his return to England, under the teaching of Peter Böhler, a Moravian minister in London, did he find it as his own conscious possession.

Before Wesley had entered upon this experience he had for months been preaching it as the privilege of believers in Christ. But from the hour when he felt the new life within his own soul his preaching possessed a new power. He made this the principal theme of his discourses, argued it from

Scripture, and illustrated it from his own experience. His preaching was received with bitter opposition, and his experience was regarded with contempt. Pulpit after pulpit in his own Church was closed against him, he was attacked from all quarters, and his bishop was again and again called upon to silence him.

But everywhere and all the time there was an eager desire on the part of the people to hear this new gospel. Wherever Wesley preached great multitudes gathered to listen, and a band of believers grew up around him who accepted his teachings and enjoyed this inward life. In derision, these people were called METHODISTS. The name bestowed in contempt was accepted in meekness, for it fitly expressed the principle of the new Society that of living by rule, and the name is now borne as a badge of honor by more people than constitute any other body of Christians established by one man.

If among the doctrines of our Church there is one more prominent than the others, one which is our peculiar inheritance from the founders of our Church, one which through a century and a half our Church has proclaimed with greater emphasis than any other, it is the doctrine of "the witness of the Spirit."

John Wesley did not originate this doctrine. It shines in every page of St. Paul's Epistles, and breathes in the writings of St. John. It radiates from the early Christian fathers. Through the Dark Ages it illumines the songs of Bernard and the prayers of Thomas à Kempis. But in the strifes that followed the Reformation, when dogma was made more prominent than experience, it was almost forgotten. A few small bodies of Christians, like the Moravians, kept the truth alive, as a seed destined to bear fruit in other generations. From the Moravians John Wesley received it, and through Wesley

and the Church which he founded it has been proclaimed throughout the world. Now it is the heritage of the children of God under every name.

Let us never forget that the doctrine—and more than the doctrine, the personal experience—of the witness of the Spirit is, as Luther said of its closely-related doctrine, that of justification by faith, “the article of a standing or a falling Church.” Every one of us should know of a surety that he has passed from death unto life.

There are three tokens by which one may test his own experience for evidence that this divine change has been wrought in him: there will be an outward change in conduct, so far as it may be needed; there will be the fruits of the Spirit in character, such fruits as are enumerated by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians (Gal. v, 22, 23); and underneath all, and crowning all, there will be the direct testimony stamped by the

Spirit of God upon the consciousness of the saved man. All these three evidences should unite in a true conversion to Christ, and the lack of any one of them may well cause a man to ask carefully whether he is or is not one of Christ's real followers.

In the form of this experience there may be differences as wide as the individualities of men. To one it may break suddenly as the lightning from the clouds, while to another it may grow as gradually as the dawning of the day. One may be able to point to the very place and the very hour when he received the witness, while another may not have noted them, so gently and gradually, as the growth of months, did the new life arise within. One may receive it in silence, another with a shout. One may struggle for it with wrestlings of soul, tearing the nature asunder, while another may receive it in the instant when his own will is submitted to the Divine will. One may

find it a great joy, and another a great peace. One may feel like telling all his neighbors of his newly-found treasure, while another may feel like sitting down alone to meditate upon his happiness.

Let no one be distressed because his experience is not like another's; and let no one judge another whose experience is unlike his own; but let each one for himself seek the assurance of his faith, the witness of the Spirit; let him test it, not by the testimonies of others, but by the Word of life; let him bear witness to his own inner consciousness; and let him rejoice in it as God's treasure intrusted to him.

IX.

THE HIGHER LIFE.

THERE lived out on the prairie an old woman who during a long life had met nothing but adversity. Her purse had been always straitened, her hands were hard and bony from incessant toil, and her face was seamed with its many cares. In her old age she was brought to the East, and at Ocean Grove for the first time in her life saw the Atlantic Ocean. She stood on the beach as if entranced, gazing upon the limitless blue with its fringe of rolling surf. Her weather-worn cheeks lighted up, her eyes glowed, and she said:

“I am glad to see something there is enough of!” That was all, and that was eloquent.

That sentence illustrates the view which we as a Church hold concerning the life in Christ, when Jesus said, "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness." He did not add, "for they shall go on hungering and thirsting, and shall never be satisfied;" but he did say, "for they shall be filled." When Paul wrote, "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly, and I pray God your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ," he meant it and believed it. When John wrote, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin," the words were not written as a rhetorical finish, but as the statement of the believer's privilege.

The soul that has sought Christ and has submitted to his will enters into a new relation, and at the same time undergoes a great change. The new relation, in the language of St. Paul, is "justification," or "en-

rightenment." He is *set right* in his relation to God's law; his sins are forgiven, and he is reconciled with God through Christ. The great change is that called "sanctification," or the being set apart for God, the new character which he bears, as transformed into the likeness of Christ. A new life is implanted within him, through which he can do God's will as he could not do it before the Divine power was imparted. It may become "entire sanctification," not because he may be perfect in his character, but because his entire being, embracing body, soul, and spirit, may be brought under the dominion of Jesus Christ.

In the development of this completeness of Christian character there are often distinct stages, or states, or levels. To some believers the boundary-line is distinctly marked, and the disciple passes at a definite moment from one stage to the other; to others the progress is so gradual that the

steps of ascent are scarcely noticed. It is as when one climbs the Rocky Mountains. If he comes from the Pacific side, he mounts a series of precipices, scaling height after height, and from the summit can see the lower levels. If he ascends from the west, he begins at the Missouri River, and rises so gradually as not to know where the prairie has ended and the mountain begun. But, though coming by different paths and through varied experiences, the two disciples may clasp hands upon the mountain summit.

These two stages of Christian living are the realm of *duty* and the realm of *love*. There is the level of duty, whereon the disciple lives in some measure not as a son, but as a servant, scourged by his conscience to do the things that he ought, but does not desire. He turns away from temptation, but with a mighty longing in his nature after the forbidden pleasure. He reads his Bible as a task, not because he finds its pages

interesting. He goes to the prayer-meeting and the class-meeting and the Church service because his duty calls him thither, but oftentimes he would fain be found elsewhere. There are worldly delights which call him; but he knows that they are siren voices, and, like the sailors of old, he shuts his ears and will not listen to them. He knows that he ought to bear testimony for Christ, and he speaks, though his knees tremble, his throat chokes, and his lip quivers. He hesitates to speak to a soul about salvation; but he knows that it may perish if he remains silent, and therefore he bears his cross, and utters the words which come from an iron will, not from a ready heart. As he looks within, he can see two natures struggling, the better and the worse, and often the worse seems to master the better. Sometimes the angry word leaps to his lips, and he must afterward sorrow for his passion.

Yet he knows that he loves his Savior,

and, upon the whole, is happy in his service; yes, a thousand times happier than he felt himself in the service of sin. There is the same old warfare within, the worse and the better fighting for mastery; but now in each struggle he wins a victory. There are times when his joy in the Lord is abundant, and never for one moment does his will swerve from the purpose to live for God. The tides of his feeling roll up and down by turns; now ardent, mounting toward God, then receding toward the world, leaving dry and sandy wastes.

Let not this disciple despond. God knows his determination to do the Divine will. God honors it, and God will reward it. Not one aspiration of his heart is in vain. His eyes shall yet behold the King in his beauty, and for him there is a seat at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

There is, however, "a higher life" for this struggling follower of Christ. It is the life

where duty is done, but done from the motive of love; where duty, though done, is lost in love. In this higher life the disciple is no more a servant, but a son; for God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into his heart. The transformation from servitude (even though it be serving the King) into sonship may come gradually, or it may break like a revelation in some moment of high consecration; and only God knows in which way to send it. But when it comes, the old struggle within the man of God ceases, and peace dwells in the nature.

He now turns from temptation with his whole heart, and with no desire to taste the forbidden fruit. He reads and studies his Bible with relish, for he finds in it a message from One whom his soul loves. He attends the gatherings of God's people, not under the compulsion of duty, but because he loves the brotherhood, enjoys the fellowship of God's people, and finds his Lord among them.

He gives his testimony because his heart is full and his lips are eager to tell of God's grace. He speaks to men in behalf of Christ because he loves men as men, just as Christ loves them; not because he finds them congenial in their disposition, nor lovable in their nature, but because they are men whom Christ loves, men to save whom Christ died. As he looks conscientiously within he sees no longer two warring natures, but one nature, the new man in Christ; for the old man of sin is cast forth.

This is the life of thoroughness in Christ's service, with single eye and single aim. It is the life of joy, for joy comes to the heart according to the measure that it is fixed and full. It is the life of peace; of peace with God, which comes with entire reconciliation; and of peace within, which comes when the heart is undivided. It is the life of power, for the nature is consecrated and concentrated; all its weight given to Christ, and its weakness supplemented, empowered by Di-

vine strength. It is a perfect life; not perfect in being free from flaws of judgment; not perfect in that its possessor never makes a mistake; not perfect in that it comes fully up to its inner ideal; not perfect in that the flesh is always wholly mastered by the Spirit. While we are in the body we must share the weaknesses and imperfections of the body. But it is perfect, because in intent and purpose it is wholly given to Christ, and, so far as may be, is wholly possessed, controlled, directed by his will.

How may we rise into this higher life? By doing every known duty as a faithful, loyal servant of Christ; by a constant and full consecration, surrendering every element of our being to his will; by earnest, repeated prayer for the complete acceptance of his power.

What a Church might ours be if each of its nearly three million members were walking in the fullness of this life, or were eagerly, whole-heartedly seeking after it!

X.

THE GENERAL RULES.

“HAVE the General Rules been read this year?” This is question No. 31 of the fourth Quarterly Conference, asked once a year by every presiding elder in the Methodist Episcopal Church, and answered by the pastor, almost invariably in the negative, although paragraph 193, section 4 of the Discipline (edition of 1900) names among the duties of the pastor or preacher in charge, “to read and explain the General Rules at least once a year in every congregation.”

Yet, in the face of this strict requirement, who of the young people in our Church have ever heard the General Rules read by the pastor on Sunday, or on any other day, in presence of the congregation?

As one reads about the General Rules in the Discipline and elsewhere he might suppose that they are almost as sacred as the Ten Commandments. The General Conference is supreme in our Methodism. It makes bishops, and orders them about, and sits in judgment on their actions. It can rewrite the Discipline pretty much as it pleases; but when the General Conference wishes to alter any sentence in these General Rules, it must send down its suggestions to all the Annual and Lay Electoral Conferences in the Church—in America, Europe, Asia, and Africa—and obtain a vote of two-thirds of those present and voting favorable to the proposed change, and also a vote of two-thirds in the General Conference itself. We might assert that, practically, the General Rules are unalterable. (It is more than a generation since one line has been changed in their language, and no one can tell how many generations will pass before another syllable shall be altered.)

Yet the young person who reads these Rules in the cold light of the twentieth century is apt to ask why they should be regarded as so all-important. He observes that they are written in an antiquated style; that they speak of "the Society" instead of "the Church;" that they do not name among the standards any doctrines to be believed; that they do not call attention to the inner spiritual life, but to external acts and duties; that they name as forbidden some wrong acts which nobody in respectable society nowadays would think of doing, such as "fighting," "brawling," "slaveholding, buying and selling slaves," etc.; that they condemn in an unsparing manner some things that are very common, even among Church members, such as "the putting on of gold and costly apparel," "laying up treasure on earth," "the singing those songs or reading those books which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God," "softness and needless self-indulgence;" that they sound as if

made for another world than our own, with their allusions to "buying and selling goods that have not paid the duty," "giving or taking things on usury;" that they command some things rather unreasonable, as "buying one of another, helping each other in business." Must I hunt up the Methodist groceryman, a mile away, for oatmeal and mackerel, and not buy of the German grocer on the next corner?

Probably every young reader of these General Rules has turned from the perusal of them with a slight feeling of disappointment, perhaps even of vexation. But is not such the feeling with which the uninformed mind reads the text of most ancient documents, as Magna Charta and the Book of Leviticus? We need "the historical perspective" for the understanding of most platforms, confessions of faith, and catechisms that were prepared for other days and other demands than those of the present.

The student of Methodist history, who ap-

preciates the conditions under which those Rules were written, more than a century and a half ago, who sees in them the handwriting of a great man, who takes into his view the class of people for whom they were originally prepared, reads them with a lively interest, and sees in them a deep, abiding meaning. They were written by John Wesley, as the rules for his own "Societies," long before any man dreamed that those Societies would ever become an independent Church; hence the use of the title "United Societies." They are a set of definite *rules*, not of general precepts; hence they state, by name, in an exceedingly plain fashion, the duties to be done and the evils to be avoided. John Wesley was by nature a very direct and straightforward man, and he wrote precisely the things which he wished done, and those things not to be done, by those whom he received into his classes; for during his life Wesley was the absolute ruler of his

Society, receiving whom he chose, excluding whom he deemed unfit for membership, and making his own rules without submitting them to the vote of any organized body.

Moreover, the people for whom these Rules were originally written belonged almost wholly to what were regarded as the lower orders of society, both in England and afterward in America. They were plain, working people, earnest in their desire after God, but not learned in wordly knowledge. Some of them, before their conversion to Christ, had been addicted to the lower vices named in these Rules, as fighting, quarreling, using profane and coarse language. Some of them dwelt on the coast of England, and had made their living by smuggling, or bringing into the country goods that had not paid the duty to the Government; for England at that time maintained a high protective tariff, as the United States does now. Some of the early Methodists had been sailors serving on slave-

ships, stealing Negroes in Africa and selling them in America. Both smuggling and slave-trading were practiced by Christians and Church members. Wesley's friend, George Whitefield, the most eloquent preacher of his age, at one time held slaves; but Wesley, far in advance of his age, declared slavery to be "the sum of all villainies," and declared also that no seller of men and women could belong to his Society.

There was in those days a good reason for the rule of "helping each other in business, buying of each other," etc.; for many of the early Methodists suffered persecution for their opinions. They were discharged from employment, their shops were "boycotted," and they were attacked by roughs, often with the connivance of magistrates and of clergymen. For this reason Wesley urged his followers to help each other in obtaining employment, and to buy at the stores of their fellow-members.

Any one who reads these rules with a knowledge of Methodist history no longer looks upon them as antiquated lumber, but is touched with a tender feeling. He feels toward them somewhat as a New Englander feels toward that compact drawn up in the cabin of the *Mayflower* by the Pilgrim fathers. Every Rule, to him who reads it aright, has its story to tell of changed hearts, of transformed lives, of characters molded after the likeness of Christ, of self-denials and sufferings endured "in his name."

The early Methodists practiced and enforced plainness of dress. They kept the Rule with regard to "the wearing of gold and costly apparel" literally, and they allowed none to "attend class"—when class attendance was the test of membership—who wore jewelry or ornaments. This Rule has been allowed to lapse into neglect, yet its underlying principle, that dress should be modest, and not in the extreme of fashion, avoiding

undue expense and show, is a good rule, one that should be observed by all disciples of Christ.

We do not interpret the Rule against "singing those songs and reading those books which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God" to be opposed either to secular music or to general literature; for there may be a music which uplifts the soul and a knowledge which enlarges the mind without being, in name, religious.

"The letter killeth," wrote St. Paul of certain interpretations of Scripture. We are not to read the General Rules of our Church literally in every line, but rather to seek for the foundations upon which they are built. We should read them, not blindly, but thoughtfully and intelligently. We should seek to enter into their spirit, and we should follow them less as regulations than as principles of conduct.

XI.

THE ARTICLES OF RELIGION.

THERE is in the Discipline one series of formulas which stands even more solid upon its foundation than the General Rules, and that is the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The General Rules may be mended, if ever two-thirds of the Annual and Lay Electoral Conferences and two-thirds of the General Conference can be made to believe that they need mending. But no power in the Church can alter or amend the twenty-five Articles of Religion, which stand as the opening paragraphs of the Discipline. Not even a unanimous vote of preachers and people could change them. They appear to be the fundamentals of our faith and the essence

of true doctrine; for every person entering our Church must answer affirmatively the question, "Do you believe in the doctrines of Holy Scripture as set forth in the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church?"

From the prominence given to these statements, standing as they do at the beginning of the Book of Discipline, unalterable, and demanding the acceptance of every member, it might be reasonably inferred that they contain the essentials of our creed, and especially those elements of our belief wherein our Church differs from other Churches. But as we read carefully these Articles, we find in them nothing about the universality of the redemption wrought by Christ, nothing about man's freedom of will in his own salvation, nothing about the witness of the Spirit, or the inner life, or entire sanctification. All those views which Methodism holds as its peculiar heritage

seem to be omitted from this great confession of our faith.

And the Articles, when carefully read, state simply what all sensible and godly people of all denominations believe, and have always believed, that God is one, and yet of three Persons, a statement which we must believe without trying to comprehend; that Jesus Christ is very God, and also very man; that the Holy Spirit is a Person, having the traits of God; that the Scriptures contain the truth necessary to our salvation; and other declarations which no Christian disputes. In fact, the Articles of Religion deal with what some would call "dead issues;" they state conclusions upon questions that have been settled, and, apparently, settled forever. They can not be changed; but, in point of fact, who would ever wish to change them?

It is, however, a mistake to think that because a question has been settled it is there-

fore a "dead issue." It is living still, so long as the Church enjoys the fruits of its life. The truths, that there is a God, that God is One, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, are living truths, and it is the highest wisdom to have these and other cardinal truths asserted, written down, placed in enduring form, and held as Articles of a living faith.

Peaceful as those Articles appear in our time, the common ground of all believers, every one of them has been, in its day, a battlefield, and these numbered statements are like the marble monuments dotting fields like Waterloo and Gettysburg, for they tell where in other days the storm of war raged; and they tell, too, of priceless benefits won for us by those mighty warriors of centuries past. On one of these articles we see Augustine rallying around him the people of God out of a decaying empire; on another we see Jerome bringing together the books

of the Bible and arranging the canon; on another stands "Athanasius against the world;" others bring before us Martin Luther, and bold John Knox, and clear-sighted John Calvin. These Articles are not the dry bones of death; they are the "faith of our fathers, living still."

Here and there we see in them names and epithets left from strifes which were fought out long ago. More people know from these Articles that "the Pelagians do vainly talk" than can tell who the Pelagians are or what they talk about. But when we recall how sharp those old strifes were, and over what apparently small questions they often arose, we do not wonder that a tomahawk or two may still be found half-buried in these Articles. We wonder, rather, that every article does not bristle with the names of sects and sectaries, once mighty, but now forgotten.

At first only twenty-four Articles of Re-

ligion were selected by John Wesley from the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England, a platform of principles adopted in the age of the Reformation, in the sixteenth century. The English article which announced the king as head of the State and of the Church, and required allegiance to his person, was, of course, omitted.

It is a noteworthy fact, and one of which Methodists may justly have a little pride, that the Article numbered twenty-three, concerning the Rulers of the United States of America, was the first official statement made by any ecclesiastical body recognizing the Government of the United States. It was probably written by Bishop Asbury, and was inserted in a later edition of the Discipline, after the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church. As the Methodist Episcopal Church began to gain members in Canada, in Europe, and else-

where, it was found needful to subjoin a footnote expressive of loyal submission to every Government under which the Church is established.

Bishop Asbury and the representatives of the Church called upon President Washington soon after his inauguration, and presented to him the loyal greetings of our Church in advance of any other denomination in the land. The Methodist Episcopal Church may call itself, in one sense, the oldest Church in America, for its organization was the earliest that recognized the new Republic.

If we look in our Articles of Religion for that which is specifically and technically Methodist, we shall look in vain. But we do not need to search deeply into them to find statements of a true, broad, conservative, living, catholic faith. They will bear close study from every thoughtful member of our Church, and they will reward it.

XII.

THE REQUISITES FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

OUR young Christian has passed through the stage of a six months' probation, his name has been considered and accepted by the pastor and the Board, and now he is standing before the altar-rail of the church in the presence of the congregation. One of the great hours of his lifetime is upon him. He is turning away finally from the world, and is entering the open door of the Church. A few moments more, and he will receive the hand-clasp which betokens his reception into the mystic communion of the body of Christ. In that moment of crisis, what are the requirements laid upon him?

First of all, it is expected that he shall hold to the doctrines or beliefs of the Church with which he is now to be united. It is true that the Methodist Episcopal Church has never laid great stress upon doctrines, and has never tied its members closely to a denominational creed. All that is absolutely required of the new member is that he shall believe in the general statement of doctrine set forth in the twenty-five Articles of Religion; and we have already seen that these Articles state the common belief of evangelical Christians, which can be accepted by any person who accepts the Bible as written by inspired men, and regards Jesus Christ as a Divine Being. Compare, or rather contrast, these Articles with the hard and fast definitions, for example, in the Presbyterian Confession of Faith.

There are, besides these Articles of Religion, as we have observed, certain doctrines which are peculiar to Methodism, not in the

sense that our Church alone holds to them, but that we have always emphasized them and made them prominent. These have been named as the doctrines of "universal redemption," "freedom of the will," "witness of the Spirit," and "entire sanctification." A person who holds views contrary to those expressed in the standards of our Church upon any of these questions has really no place among us. There is no law forbidding his reception into our fellowship, but if his belief is positive and aggressive, he will not be at home in our Church; and if it be only tacit and inactive, he can not be an earnest Christian. These are the principles for which Methodism stands, upon which it has builded, and to these principles we should give an intelligent and hearty acceptance.

The new member is expected to possess, not only the faith of the head, but also the faith of the heart. He should have a genuine spiritual life; as it is frequently termed,

“a Christian experience;” or, as it is called in the Discipline, “saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.” He should be one who has surrendered himself to do the will of Christ in his life, and to look to Christ, and to Christ only, for his salvation. His inner consciousness of acceptance with God may not, in every case, be of the brightest, for people differ in their spiritual faculties as widely as in their mental. But he should have an evidence; not only believing in the witness of the Spirit as a doctrine, but also possessing that witness as a fact in his own experience. This testimony may not be equally strong from all, for all have not the same gifts in expression; but each one should be able to testify that he has passed from death unto life, and that he knows Jesus Christ as his Savior.

The next prerequisite of a member is that he shall be in accord with the polity or system of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

As a Society, the Church must have its plan of organization, through which it seeks to promote the personal holiness of its members and the conversion of the world to Christ. Each Church aims to compass these ends in its own way, and the Methodist Episcopal Church has its way clearly defined. Every young person who expects to unite with the Church should seek to understand its general system of government. He may not know the difference between the "district steward" and the "recording steward," or between the "Official Board" and the "Quarterly Conference," but he should know that ours is an episcopal Church, and should know what kind of an episcopacy ours is. He should understand the general lines of distinction between the General, Annual, and Quarterly Conference; he should have read the Book of Discipline, and should possess a general idea of its contents, even though he might not be able to pass a severe ex-

amination upon all its paragraphs. With the plans and aims of the Church he should be in general accord. He may not think that the Church is perfect in its machinery, and yet may make a good Methodist; but if he believes that the entire machine is evil, and does more harm than good, it would be wise for him to unite with some Church organized more to his mind, if he can find one.

There is also the requisite of character and conduct. The Church makes certain demands with respect to the life of its members. In the language of the Ritual, he is required "to forsake the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, and all sinful desires of the same." Some people evidently regard these sentences as "glittering generalities," without special meaning, except that the Christian should live up to the average moral standard of society around him. But our Church, by its traditions, and also in its enactments, has

interpreted this pledge of the baptismal covenant as the renunciation of certain specific acts, such as dancing, theater-going, card-playing, and all use of intoxicating drinks. One of our bishops has justly denominated these as "the four evils of modern society."

There may be a rigid interpretation of these requirements, or there may be a liberal interpretation, consistent with Christian character; but whoever deliberately intends entirely to ignore the regulation of the Church with regard to them, should pause before he enters the Church as a member. He has no right to enter the Methodist Episcopal Church and at the same time to continue in these pleasures, which are everywhere recognized as badges of the world, and not of Christ. The difference between our Church and other Churches is not in its attitude toward these evils. Other Churches, through their leaders, have spoken as vigor-

ously against these pleasures as any Methodist has ever spoken; but they have not embodied their opinions into law, as our Church has. For reasons that have been deemed sufficient, the supreme body in our Church has made definite rules against these forms of worldly pleasure, and thus far it has not seen fit to repeal those rules. That the law is broken by many members, or that it is not enforced against those who violate it, does not alter the case.

Even though a youth may not agree with the conclusions of the law-makers (it is barely possible that he has not considered thoroughly the arguments for them), it is fitting that he should respect those conclusions. And he should consider whether the Church will do more for his soul than those forbidden pleasures will do. He should consider which he can the more wisely afford to sacrifice—these pleasures, or the Church; and if he accepts the benefits of the Church,

he should also accept the sacrifices which it entails, and to renounce all things that appear inconsistent with the conduct of one who bears the vows of a member of Christ's body.

We name but one more requisite for the Church member: He must expect to bear his share of the Church's burdens. Those burdens are of three kinds, thought, work, and money. There are the cares of the Church to be carried, and every member is expected to take an interest in them; the work of the Church, through varied agencies, is to be done, and every member should help in doing it; the expenses of the Church are to be met, and every member, even the youngest, should contribute toward them. On our ocean steamers there are cabin passengers who have nothing to do except to sit on the deck and visit in the parlor; but on board the old ship Zion everybody belongs to the crew, and must work his passage.

Let every young Christian consider thoughtfully the above requirements, five in number, and prepare himself for membership in that great Society whose Head is in heaven—the Church of Jesus Christ.

XIII.

THE CHURCH OFFICIARY.

THE Church of Jesus Christ exists in this world for one purpose—to win souls. But the winning of souls is not accomplished when a number of people have “joined the Church.” They must be converted, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and must be built up to completeness of Christian character. Not until a soul is ripe for heaven has it been fully won to Christ. The training of souls is as important as the gathering of them into the Church, and it should never for one moment be lost to view.

This work of training and upbuilding requires some form of organization for mutual helpfulness and care; and as an organization the Church must have a business side as

well as a spiritual side. The founder of Methodism was a consummate man of business as well as a great preacher and a great reformer, and a mighty element in the success of Methodism has been its systematic organization, initiated by John Wesley, and wrought out, since his day, through generations of watchful, painstaking attention to detail.

We may speak contemptuously of "the machine;" but machinery has transformed the world, and makes Europe and America different from India and Africa. If the movement of machinery were stopped, the world would come to a standstill, and would soon drop back into the Dark Ages. What the Church needs is not fewer wheels, but more of the spirit of "the living creature within the wheels," as Ezekiel saw in his vision.

The Church must have a pastor, all of whose time and ability will be needed for his

preaching and pastoral duties. Hence, he must be supported by his congregation; and his support involves not only a financial plan, but with it officers to carry out the plan. The Church must have a place of meeting. The building that is fitted for a lecture hall or a concert room is not precisely adapted to the requirements of a Church. The early Christians, it is true, met in private houses, and one sect of our time, known as Plymouth Brethren, prefers, on what it considers Scriptural ground, to meet in houses, or halls, and not to own buildings for its worship. But for the practical working of a Church a building is a necessity, and it seems appropriate that the house dedicated to the worship of God should be more beautiful, as it must be larger, than an ordinary dwelling. The possession of property brings with it cares and necessities. It must be furnished, kept in order, warmed in winter, lighted at night, insured against

fire, and repaired. A board or committee of the Church is required for the charge of its property interests.

There are spiritual interests, as well as temporal, to be cared for. The pastor needs helpers to watch over his flock, to strengthen and train the members, to nurture the young disciples, to admonish any who may be wandering, to visit the sick and to aid the needy.

We find, then, that in a Church which fulfills its mission three classes of officers are needed—men who shall watch over the spiritual life of the members, men who shall support and counsel the pastor, and men who shall hold and care for the property. In the economy or system of Methodism these three departments are represented in the leaders, the stewards, and the trustees, and these three elements together constitute the officary of the local Church.

The leaders are subpastors, appointed by

the preacher in charge, and it is their work to supervise and strengthen the spiritual life of the members. Once every Methodist was a member of a class, and under the care of a leader; and in the class-meeting, besides giving his testimony, he paid his weekly contribution toward "the support of the gospel," which was understood to mean the salary of the preacher. In most of our Churches the class-meeting is now less prominent than it was in former times; but every charge has still its class-leaders.

The stewards are the pastor's helpers in the temporal work as the leaders are in the spiritual. The finances enter largely into their work, for they are expected to see that the pastor has a support, and that it is paid regularly; that the presiding elder and the bishop receive their allowance; and that the poor and distressed members of the Church are aided. They are also required to inform the pastor of any who are sick and need

attention, and of any who are disorderly, and should be called to account. They are directed in the Discipline "to tell the ministers of what they think wrong in them"—one of those direct sentences showing the handwriting of John Wesley. Together, the stewards constitute the pastor's cabinet concerning the work of the Church. At their meeting the pastor is always chairman.

The trustees have charge of the Church property. They are its owners, but only in trust for the Methodist Episcopal Church; for they can not sell it (even to build another church) without consent of the Annual Conference; they can not transform it into a church of any other organization; and they can not shut out of its pulpit a pastor regularly appointed. The trustees are to see that its debts are provided for; that it is kept in repair, warmed, and lighted. Whatever bills belong to the Church property are to be met

by the trustees, while those connected with the pastoral support go to the stewards.

These three classes of officials are not chosen in the same way. The preacher in charge appoints all the leaders, and can change them at will, for they are his assistant pastors. The stewards are elected by the Quarterly Conference, once in each year; but the preacher in charge has the right of nomination. The trustees, in most States, are elected by the congregation, according to the State laws; but where they are not thus provided for, are chosen by the Quarterly Conference in the same manner as the stewards.

Each of these boards may meet separately for its own business, or all may be united as "the Official Board," where all the business of the Church is transacted, with the pastor as chairman; though in that case the trustees may still have a separate meeting for

matters pertaining to the property. When the Official Board is duly organized, it consists not only of the leaders, stewards, and trustees, but also of the licensed exhorters, local preachers, the Sunday-school superintendent, and the president of the Epworth League.

Once in three months the presiding elder holds his visitation, and then the Official Board becomes a Quarterly Conference, with the presiding elder in the chair, and the meeting is vested with an authority above that of any other assemblage in the local Church. At the Quarterly Conference a series of questions, all set down in the Discipline, brings every department of the Church work in review.

Every young Methodist hears from the pulpit announcement of "leaders' meetings," "stewards' meetings," "trustees' meetings," "Officials Board meetings," "Quarterly Conference meetings," but few who are outside

of these boards, and not all who are in them, know just the distinctions between them. Every member of the Church should seek to understand just what is meant by each official title and just what is done by each board.

XIV.

THE CLASS-MEETING.

LIKE most great institutions, the Methodist class-meeting was a growth from small and seemingly accidental beginnings. When the Rev. John Wesley began to preach his gospel it was new to England, though as old as the early Church; and his teachings awakened the deepest and the widest interest. Multitudes of people came to see Mr. Wesley, that they might learn the way of salvation. At first he talked and prayed with each inquirer; then he met them in companies, an evening in one place, and the next evening in another, all the members in one place meeting together. But as Mr. Wesley could not be everywhere at once—although he came nearer to that aim than any other man of his century—he soon found

it necessary to appoint in each place some one to represent him—to lead the meeting, to give counsel to those who had assembled, and to pray with them.

The first Society was formed in London in 1739, and consisted of sixty members. Soon after, another on the same plan was established at Bristol, and others followed at Bath, Kingswood, and many others places in England. As all these groups were under the direction of Mr. Wesley, they soon became known collectively as “The United Society,” which is the title given to them in the General Rules of the Discipline (edition of 1900, paragraph 27).

At first the sole purpose of these meetings was to promote and to watch over the personal holiness of their members; but soon another and important department of work was added. On February 15, 1742, Mr. Wesley met the principal members of his Society in Bristol to consult concerning the

payment of a debt on the "meeting-house;" for in those days the Methodist house of worship was not considered a "church," nor even a "chapel," but was called a "preaching-house" or a "meeting-house." In order to raise the requisite funds, it was agreed that each member should pay every week one penny—the equivalent of two cents in our currency. For this contribution the Society was divided into sections, each section consisting of about twelve persons, one of whom, as the collector, was expected to meet each member weekly and receive his penny. At first they called upon the members at their homes, but soon began holding meetings with them; and when the pennies had been paid, they sang, and prayed, and talked together of the life which all the members enjoyed. Beginning with a financial purpose, the gathering soon became an assembly for religious inquiry, having, generally, the collector for its leader.

John Wesley was a statesman of the highest ability; and his quick eye saw that here was a plan with great possibilities for religious training, for supervision, and for the solidifying of his Societies, as well as for meeting their expenses. From Bristol, the method was introduced into the parent Society in London, and thence throughout the work as it enlarged, until England, and at last the English-speaking world, was covered with a network of class-meetings.

There was a time, two generations ago, when every Methodist belonged to a class and was under the care of a leader. Although the testimonies were not after the order of a confessional, yet the meeting was regarded as strictly private, and no outsider was allowed to attend for more than two or three times without becoming a member. The leader was appointed by the "preacher in charge," as the pastor was then termed and is still termed in the Discipline, and to the

preacher the leader was responsible. Each member when received into the Church was assigned to a class, and was supposed either to attend its meetings or to be visited at home by his leader. The preacher's salary was collected through the class, and paid over monthly by the leaders at the "leaders and stewards' meeting."

Once in three months a union meeting of all the classes in the charge was held, called a "love-feast," and for this meeting tickets of admission were issued to the members, signed by the leaders, so that none outside of "the Society" could be present. Some of these old "love-feast tickets" are still preserved as heirlooms in Methodist families, whose great-grandmothers received them from their leaders. As a token of brotherly love, at this meeting plates of bread were passed, from which each member took a morsel, and bowls of water, from which each took a sip. This was not looked upon as a

sacrament, but simply as a sign of mutual regard. After the taking of bread and water, fervent testimonies were given; and often the ardor of the meeting was such that a regulation was placed in the Discipline forbidding the love-feast to be held for more than an hour and a half. (Paragraph 193, section 9.)

In England and in Canada attendance upon the class is still a test of membership; but throughout the Methodist Episcopal Church it has become a voluntary service, and in many places the members are no longer assigned to classes, but attend them only as they desire. The rule of twelve members to a class is no more observed, and, as a result, there are under popular leaders classes of a hundred or more members, sometimes rivaling the prayer-meeting in their attendance, while in other places the class-meeting is well-nigh a forgotten institution and its leadership a lost art.

Under the circuit system which prevailed in the early days the class-meeting was a necessity. Then one preacher served for a dozen villages, and visited them all in turn, perhaps once in four weeks. During the interval of his visits the class-leader was a sub-pastor, meeting the members every week, conducting a service in which all took part, and giving to each such encouragement and advice as was required. The leader entered into personal relation with each member of his little flock. He saw them at their homes and places of employment as well as in the class-meeting. He brought to the attention of every member the duty of systematic giving, and received his contribution. He visited the sick, comforted the troubled, encouraged the feeble in heart; if need was, he warned the unruly or backslidden. He was the eye, the hand, and the foot of his pastor in the supervision of his members.

One great benefit of the class-meeting is

in the fact that it brings the member face to face at regular intervals with himself, and calls upon him to tell how it is with his soul. This requirement exercises a wholesome restraint upon the conduct. Many a young man has been kept away from a dance on Tuesday night because he knew that on Thursday night he must "speak his experience" in the class-meeting. Said an eminent minister of our Church: "In the early days of my religious life more than once the class-meeting tied a knot in the rope which kept me from slipping away."

There is not only a restraining but also an upbuilding effect in the class-meeting testimony. We need something more for our growth in grace than merely to listen to good sermons and to read good books; we need to think and to speak of God's work in our own hearts. It is not enough for the young disciple in a meeting to call for the singing of a hymn or to repeat a text of

Scripture. He needs to utter a sentence of his own thought out of his own experience. One may listen to sermons for a month with less benefit to his spiritual nature than may come as the reflex influence upon himself of a single testimony. This was one great power in the old-fashioned class-meeting. It was not perfect, and many defects might be shown in it; but it gave to Methodism a generation of Christians who could speak, and pray, and exhort with a clearness and directness and interest unequaled even by people of higher intelligence and larger knowledge, but who had missed the training of the class-meeting.

The class-meeting gives to the young Christian the fellowship of older and more experienced disciples. It is one drawback to the "young people's meeting" that in it the young follower of Christ, just entering the way and forming his ideals, listens only to the testimonies of those who are young, like

himself. He needs, also, the benefit of a class-meeting where old and young meet together. Each age needs the other; the one to gain knowledge, the other to gain sympathy. In an ideal Church the old and the young, the educated and the illiterate, the rich and the poor, the fervent and the calm, all meet together, and each type of character learns something from all the others.

Great as have been the gains of our Church in wealth, in social position, in general culture, and in Bible knowledge, it is doubtful whether we have gained enough to compensate us for the loss in a certain power which has resulted from the decline in the class-meeting. May we not hope that the Epworth League, which is quickening the pulse of our young people, may yet revive the ancient interest in this time-honored institution of our Church?

XV.

THE LOCAL PREACHER.

OUR age is pre-eminently one of Christian work by the laity. Laymen take part in public meetings with freedom. They stand in the pulpit, conduct religious services, preach sermons, and pronounce the benediction. Many of the leading evangelists of our time have been laymen, as Mr. Moody and Mr. Whittle in the recent past, and Dr. Munhall and Henry Varley in the present. For years there was a successful Baptist minister in New York who through the week sold poultry in Washington market, and on Sunday preached in his own church. I knew a gentleman, for some years president of the Produce Exchange in New York, whose ser-

mons were heard with interest in the churches of the suburban city where he resided.

Very few people know that Methodism was the first organization in modern times to call forth the abilities of laymen in religious work, and especially in preaching the gospel. When John Wesley licensed his first local preacher all the Christianity of England was astonished and shocked. For a thousand years all the public exercises of religion had been conducted by clergymen. No layman had ever prayed in public until the Methodist revival, and for a layman to expound the Scriptures or preach a sermon was an unheard of innovation.

In 1742, at one time Mr. Wesley, starting on a tour of preaching, left his Society at the Foundry in London under the temporary charge of one of his converts, Thomas Maxfield. He was directed to meet with the members, pray with them, and "advise

them;" but even Mr. Wesley did not deem it needful to forbid him from preaching to them, for that any layman would take a text and preach upon it was unthinkable! After a few weeks the startling intelligence was borne to Mr. Wesley that Maxfield was preaching sermons night after night, and with such power that people were actually being converted. Mr. Wesley at once stopped his tour of evangelistic work and returned to London, intending to put an immediate end to such dangerous irregularity.

At his house, adjoining the Foundry, he was fortunate in finding that wise woman, his mother. She said to him: "John, take care what you do with respect to that young man, for he is as surely called of God to preach as you are. Examine what have been the fruits of his preaching, and hear him yourself." John Wesley had learned by experience that it was well to respect his mother's counsel, and fortunate indeed was

it for Christianity that he followed it at that time; for if there had been no Thomas Maxfield, and no John Wesley to authorize his preaching, there would have been no Dwight L. Moody.

John Wesley sat and listened to Thomas Maxfield's sermon one night in the Foundry. It must have been no easy task for the first lay preacher to deliver his discourse under the scrutiny of those eyes; but he stood the test with such success that Wesley gave him authority to preach in all the Societies. It was not long before others were found to possess the same evidences of a call to preach, and in a few years the Methodist body contained a large number of lay preachers, men unordained, and not allowed to administer the sacraments, but preaching sermons, often better than those of the regular clergy.

There was in those time a necessity for lay preaching. Few of the clergy in England

possessed a genuine spiritual life. Their preaching was cold, formal, and powerless. The few ordained ministers in the Wesleyan movement—not over a half-dozen in all—could not meet the demands upon them, and were compelled to send out lay preachers who were imbued with their own spirit. In America the need was even greater than in England. There were scarcely any ministers of the episcopal order, to which Mr. Wesley belonged; and the early Methodists on these shores, as Philip Embury in New York, Robert Strawbridge in Maryland, Freeborn Garrettson on the Hudson River, and others associated with them, did not wait for ordination, or even for license, for there was no prelate in these parts to bestow either. They went everywhere preaching a plain gospel of salvation by faith in Christ, and a living experience of grace.

In the early times nearly all the Methodist preachers in England and all of those in

America were laymen. Mr. Wesley and a few others, as Charles Wesley, John Fletcher, and Thomas Coke, were entitled to put the prefix Rev. to their names; but all the rest were plain Mr., even though they had charge of circuits and preached every day of their lives. Late in life, John Wesley, believing himself to be, what he was, in the sight of the Head of the Church, a bishop, took the bold, but necessary step of setting apart a few of his preachers to administer the sacraments, at first in Scotland, and afterward in England. In 1784 he consecrated Dr. Thomas Coke, already a clergyman of the Church of England, as a bishop—though he used the title of “superintendent,” which is the word “bishop” translated into English—and empowered him to ordain ministers in America. Through Bishop Coke every Methodist minister in this land is in the line of succession from John Wesley, as truly a Church father as St. Paul or St. Peter.

Methodism has always recognized two classes of ministers—"traveling preachers" and "local preachers." The traveling preacher is one who gives all his time to the work of the ministry, and is a member of an Annual Conference. Though he may now remain year after year with one Church, he is still called a *traveling* preacher, just as he was in the early days when he rode a circuit of a dozen or more preaching places. The local preacher is one who has received license or authority to preach, but is not a member of the Annual Conference. He generally follows a secular calling, and preaches as he may be needed, though sometimes he has charge of a Church as a "supply;" that is, by appointment of the presiding elder.

At every Quarterly Conference the presiding elder asks the question, "Are there any recommendations for license to preach?" If in the membership there are any suitable persons possessing the three requisites of

“gifts, grace, and usefulness,” their names are presented by the pastor, and they are examined upon the common branches of an English education, on their general knowledge of the Bible, and their understanding of the doctrines and usages of our Church. They are also asked whether they will abstain wholly from the use of tobacco. Any member of the Quarterly Conference has the right to question the candidates if he is not satisfied with the results of the examination. The candidates are then sent out of the room, their fitness for the local preacher’s license is discussed, and the vote is taken. If it is favorable, the candidate receives a local preacher’s license, signed by the presiding elder. This certificate authorizes the holder thereof to preach in any Methodist church where he may be invited, and is good for one year. It must be renewed annually, and if it fails of renewal the local preacher drops back into the ranks of ordinary membership.

During four years the local preacher is required to pursue a course of study, upon which he is to be examined by the presiding elder, or by some person—generally the pastor—appointed by him. In England every local preacher has regular, though not constant employment, and preaches at stated intervals on the circuit. In America he is generally left to his own discretion, and preaches as he may be called upon or can find opportunity.

Sometimes it becomes desirable for the local preacher to receive ordination, that he may baptize, or may assist in the communion service, or may conduct the communion service in some place where there is no regular pastor. After being licensed as a local preacher for four years, and being recommended for deacon's orders by his Quarterly Conference or District Conference, being examined upon a Course of Study prescribed in the Discipline, upon vote of the Annual

Conference he may be ordained a deacon by the presiding bishop. After this ordination he may baptize and assist in the communion service, and is known as a local deacon. And after two years in the diaconate, he may be ordained an elder through the same process. This brings him up to the highest order in the ministry, and he is now known as a local elder. After ordination he is no longer required to have his license renewed, though he still belongs to the Quarterly Conference, and not to the Annual Conference.

In the earlier times the local preacher was a needed assistant to the ordained minister, for he could supply the pulpit while the regular pastor or "stationed preacher" was at another point on the circuit. In the settled communities of the East, where the old circuit system has generally evolved into local Churches, each supporting its own pastor, the local preacher is less a necessity than he was formerly. There are in all our cities

stately Churches which began as missions supplied by the free and unpaid services of local preachers; and there is still an abundance of work for earnest men in neglected places and in small hamlets where a preacher can not be supported. In the new West and South the need of a local ministry is as great as once it was in the East.

The local preachers of our Church have been an army of volunteers, supplementing the regular ministry, and often doing heroic labor without fee or reward, carrying on the Lord's warfare at their own charges. The system inaugurated in our own Church has worked its way up to general acceptance in other Churches. Among the Baptists are many licensed but unordained preachers, and the lay readers of the Protestant Episcopal Church are practically local preachers. The ministry of the laity, once neglected and even rejected, is now everywhere recognized as an apostolic method of Christian activity.

XVI.

THE PREACHER IN CHARGE.

EVERY denomination has its own set of terms to designate a clergyman in his relation to the congregation. In a Protestant Episcopal Church he is "the rector;" in a Scottish Presbyterian Church he is "the minister;" in a Roman Catholic Church he is "the priest;" in a Methodist Episcopal Church he is "the preacher in charge;" that is, the preacher who is placed in charge of the station by a higher authority, for a limited time.

That higher authority is represented by the bishop, in whom is vested all the power of "fixing the appointments," as that power is termed in the Discipline; not of "making the appointments," as is often said inac-

curately. A Congregational, Baptist, or Presbyterian Church "calls" its pastor, and has the power to make its own terms with him, as he has the right to make his own terms with the Church. But with us both the preacher and the people surrender a portion of their rights. The one agrees to go where he is sent by the bishop, and the other party—the people—agrees to receive the man whom the bishop shall send.

It is customary for some Churches, especially large and well-to-do Churches, to send an invitation to a preacher; that is, to name the preacher whom they desire. Their choice is often ratified by the bishop, but not always. Their will may be overruled, another preacher may be sent, and the man whom the Church has chosen may be sent elsewhere. There are abundant instances where a bishop has refused to send, even to a wealthy and important Church, the pastor whom it has chosen. In that case, both the

preacher and the Church are bound to submit for one year to the powers that be. A Methodist Church never gives a "call," and a Methodist minister never receives one in his own denomination. In our Church it is better to use the word "invitation" when we are speaking of any proposition from a Church looking toward the appointment of a pastor. And with the invitation, the words "provided the bishop consent" are always to be tacitly understood.

Everybody knows that until recently every Methodist minister was appointed to his charge for a limited period. In the earliest times, before the American Revolution and for some time after it, the preachers changed appointments every six months. Gradually the term was extended to two years, in 1864 to three years, in 1888 to five years, and in 1900 the restriction of time was removed, so that now a pastor may remain for any number of years with one Church. But his

appointment is for only one year at a time; his term of office ends at the next Conference, and if he stays he must be reappointed by the bishop. So long as the presiding bishop wills, he can be reappointed year after year to the same charge; but his reappointment is in no sense obligatory, and any year he can be removed, if the bishop considers a change desirable, either for the Church, for the minister, or for the work in general.

In fact, the bishop can remove the pastor at any time. If he believes that there is sufficient reason to transfer a minister from Maine to Oregon, or from Jacksonville to Duluth, in the middle of the Conference year, he has the authority to make the change.

While the bishop possesses this autocratic power, it is not to be supposed that he will use it, except when the good of the cause makes a strong hand necessary. The bishop has every reason for making the best possi-

ble disposition of the ministers under his care; and he is so removed from relation to the Conference as to have no favorites and no foes, either among the preachers or the Churches. It is probable that by our system the ministers and the Churches are fitted together as well, upon the whole, as they can be in a world where few things are absolutely perfect. Fifteen thousand preachers are stationed annually, yet not fifteen preachers in a year refuse to go to their appointments, or fifteen Churches refuse to receive their appointed pastors.

When the preacher has heard his appointment read by the bishop, he is expected to go to the place announced for him as soon as practicable, to preach in his new charge on the following Sunday, and to remove to it within a fortnight his family with all their belongings. The Discipline requires the new charge to pay his moving expenses, but this rule is not enforced in all sections of the

Church. The Church is also expected to have a house, or to hire one, for his occupancy, and is not allowed to deduct its rent from his salary.

If the preacher in charge is ever in doubt how he shall employ his time, a glance at the Discipline will show him more than one hundred distinct duties to be done, in addition to other activities that need no specifying. He knows that he is to preach twice or thrice each Sunday, to conduct the weekly prayer-meeting, and to visit his flock from house to house. These duties and the preparation for some of them will keep him from idleness. But the Discipline calls upon him also to take up at least eight benevolent contributions through the year, besides the assessments for the support of the bishops and the presiding elder; to preside at the meetings of his Official Board and his Sunday-school Board; to keep correctly the Church record, with all its detail of members received

and dismissed; to prepare annually elaborate statistical tables for the Conference Minutes; to organize a young people's society, and to keep it alive and working; to hold meetings for the religious instruction of the children; to circulate Methodist literature; to obtain subscribers for all our Church periodicals; to keep the subscription list renewed, to collect the payment from each subscriber, and to send it to the Book Concern. Some of these latter duties may seem scarcely appropriate to a clergyman; but for every one of them, in our economy, a good reason can be given.

Add to all these his duties in the community, as a citizen, and as a fellow-pastor with other clergymen, and as a worker, not to say a leader, in public affairs; the conventions of the Bible Society, the Sunday-school Association, the missionary cause, and of many other causes, which he is expected to attend; the reformatory organizations, including

Young Men's Christian Association, Woman's Christian Temperance Union, with associations and unions embracing in their initials most of the other letters in the alphabet; the sick to be visited, the dead to be buried, the mourners to be comforted, the sinners to be sought out, the inquirers to be directed, the revival meetings to be held, and above all, the care of souls from which he is never free. It is evident that he is "a preacher in charge" indeed.

He must be at once a student and a man of affairs, a preacher and a pastor, an executive and a clerk, a man with his feet firmly on the earth, his hands reaching out on every side, and his head above the stars.

A minister once told his congregation of a remarkable dream. He said that in his dream he was pulling a very heavy wagon up a very steep hill, and all the members of his congregation were helping him, some pushing from behind, some tugging in front. But

the hill grew steeper and steeper, while the wagon seemed to grow heavier and heavier. At last the minister paused from utter weariness, and, as he rested, looked behind, for there seemed to be a suspicious silence around the wagon. Not a member was in sight. One by one they had left him until he was entirely alone with his burden. He looked more closely, and then beheld all his congregation inside the wagon. They were enjoying the ride which he was giving them!

Perhaps that is a picture of some Churches where the preacher in charge is trying to do all the work, and the members are at ease in Zion.

XVII.

OUR ITINERANT PASTORATE.

IN the middle of the last century, about 1850, a minister of another denomination wrote a book concerning Methodism, entitled "The Great Iron Wheel." It was an attack upon our system, undertaking to set forth its unreasonableness, its tyranny, and its un-American methods. He held up to ridicule our appointment of pastors by arbitrary bishops over Churches having no power of choice, and for a period fixed. He compared the government of our Church to an iron wheel with a toothed rim, which, as it revolved, snatched up preachers and flung them down at random upon the Churches.

To one who looks at our system "in the abstract," as the philosophers say, it appears

strange, impracticable, undemocratic, and almost tyrannical. It may be asked: "Should not the people who support the pastor have a voice in choosing him? Should not a minister have a right to go wherever he desires, and wherever a congregation desires him?" In theory, a bishop, who may live in San Francisco, arrives in New York on Wednesday morning, clothed with authority over two hundred ministers, and as many Churches; knowing almost nothing about either the ministers or the Churches; and proceeds to take up, and move around, and set down men, at his own will. Then at the end of a week, the bishop leaves the preachers and their people to make the best of their new relations, and goes his way to work in the same high-handed fashion in Boston or Baltimore.

That is the impression that a stranger from New Zealand or Nova Zembla might carry home of Methodist methods, particularly if he talked with some disappointed

preacher or committee-man. But it would by no means be a correct impression. In fact, the bishop is a man of mature years, of experience in administration, and of profound love for the Church; and he is placed in such a relation to the Conference that he has no interests to make him either partial to or prejudiced against either a minister or a Church. Moreover, he has many opportunities of obtaining information as to the best arrangement of his two hundred ministers, and his two hundred Churches. There is a "cabinet" to advise him, consisting of the presiding elders, who know all the Churches and all the men. The preachers are at liberty to call upon the bishop in the intervals between the daily sessions of the Conference, and to tell him their needs and their peculiar circumstances. The laymen of the Churches also call, and state their preferences among the preachers. The bishop acts simply as a court of final resort, to which the question

of appointments is referred. Where a satisfactory arrangement has been made between a minister or a Church, it is generally ratified by the bishop. Perhaps half of the Churches are contented to retain their pastors for another year. And in the reckoning, it is generally found that the settlement of not more than twenty Churches and twenty preachers brings difficulty to the appointing power.

That there are defects in our system, no one denies. No machine that deals with men and women who have individuality, prejudice, and predilection, can work with the precision of a clock. Even clocks get out of order; and they would come to a stop oftener if their wheels were like those which Ezekiel saw, with the spirit of living creatures in them. It is easy to find defects; and much easier than it is to remedy them. But admitting some defects, let us see if the advantages in our itinerant system do not more than compensate us for its disadvantages.

One of these advantages is that under our system, at all times, every Church has a minister, and every effective minister has a Church. In other denominations from a quarter to a third of the congregations are as sheep without shepherds. Often a year, and more than a year, is passed in the endeavor to unite upon a new minister. On the day when I preached my opening discourse as pastor of our Church in a certain town, the pastor of another Church in that town gave his farewell sermon. During my whole term his Church was vainly trying to find a pastor. In the strife that arose a division took place, another Church was formed, and not until three years had passed did the party which held the property "settle" a minister. But the quarrel had permanently weakened the old Church, which has never regained its former position of leadership in that community.

A Methodist Episcopal Church is never

for a day or an hour without a preacher in charge. At the instant when "the great iron wheel" takes one man up, it drops down another, not by accident, but after careful selection among all the available ministers of the Conference. If the preacher dies during the year, the presiding elder is in charge until he or the bishop appoint another pastor. In such a system there is a great saving of energy. By any other plan, our denomination would at all times have four or five thousand Churches without pastors; by our method we have none.

What is good for the Churches is also good for the preachers. Not one of our ministers who, in the judgment of his Conference, is fit for a charge, is left without a place and a support, unless it be at his own request. The preacher may not always be satisfied with his place; but it is generally better fitted to his abilities than it would be if all the preachers and all the Churches

were left to their own affinities; for, in that case, there would be many misfits and many "left-overs," both among preachers and Churches. Everywhere, in cities and in towns, there are living excellent ministers of other denominations who have been listening for years for calls that never come. I met on a railway train a Congregational clergyman of good character and ability who in ten years had been a "stated supply" for nine Churches, and for one-third of the time had been without any charge, with no regular support and no home. The anxiety and uncertainty of such a life as his no Methodist minister knows.

Another advantage of our system is that it gives to one Church the varied abilities of many ministers. One may be an eloquent preacher, another a devoted pastor, a third, an able executive, a fourth, a church-builder, a fifth, a debt-raiser. No one among the five is perfect. but in their qualities, taken

together, they embrace a complete, all-around pastorate; and the Church will gain more by the five than it could have gained by any one.

There is a peculiar unity in our work as a Church, a general likeness in our Churches. Among other denominations the local Church is often molded to the type of its pastor. Dr. Boanerges draws around him one class of hearers, and Dr. Scholarly another, and Dr. Practical still another. Two Churches of the same denomination in one city may hold doctrines and spirit radically opposite, to such a degree that their deacons can scarcely sit down at the same council. But our itinerant pastorate imparts a unity of teaching which makes Methodism one, whether it be in Massachusetts or in Kansas, in a metropolis or in a hamlet.

The hold of our preachers upon their Churches is sometimes all the stronger because of the limitations upon the length of

the pastorate. No minister is thoroughly satisfactory to all his members. In every Church there are some who would like a change. If they feel that the pastorate is fixed upon them for life, these people are sure to be restless, and to agitate for a change. To get the minister out may break up a Church; to keep him in may cause a division. Under the old rule the moderately discontented ones were apt to say: "Two or three years is not so long. We will wait; and meantime we will stand by the preacher, and hold the Church together." Many times a minister has staid his full term because his term was limited, and has left with friendly feelings on both sides, when an unlimited pastorate would have awakened ceaseless strife and bitterness.

And although the time-limit has been removed, our present plan of annual appointment still keeps our system flexible. The Churches that wish a change, and the min-

isters who would like new fields, all change at one time in the Conference year, so that there are men to choose among, and Churches to be accepted. Some one, who was not well informed about Methodism, once said that the Annual Conference was held for the purpose of giving the preachers a chance to trade their sermons. It might be said with some truth that it is held to enable the Churches to trade their preachers.

Many ministers in the past hundred years have left our Church on account of what they considered "the burdens of the itinerancy." A few of them have risen to prominence in other Churches, as they might have risen in their mother Church. But many of them have made more frequent changes, have met with greater difficulties, and endured more hardships than their brethren who have remained. I call to mind a minister of some note who informed me, some years ago, of his intention to leave

our Church. "No bishop," said he, "shall tell me where I shall preach, and no iron rule shall compel me to leave a Church." That minister never afterward staid three years in any Church, passed through several sharp Church quarrels, candidated in vain, and has since tried a variety of uncertain employments outside of the pastorate.

No doubt our system has in its possibilities of injustice and tyranny. One bishop, with the spirit of a pope, has the power to destroy its usefulness. But such a bishop has not yet appeared, and is not likely to be chosen. With kindness and fairness in administration, as we have a right to expect in Christian men ruling over their brethren, our plan gives the largest opportunity of selection; the best facilities for fitting men to places and places to men; a tendency to curb inordinate ambition on the part of ministers, and to repress undue selfishness on the part of Churches; a motive to every

preacher for doing his best, and for doing it at once; a motive to Churches leading them to work with their pastors; and an influence toward unity in effort throughout the Church in general, which makes it a disciplined, organized army for the conquest of the world to Christ.

XVIII.

THE PRESIDING ELDER.

EVERY Methodist Episcopal Church has three pastors, the presiding bishop, who is the chief pastor; the presiding elder, who is the supervising pastor; and the preacher in charge, who is the appointed pastor. Each of these holds a part of the pastoral relation, and all receive a salary from the Church. The presiding elder occupies a place midway between the two other pastors.

To one who knows nothing of the Methodist ways of working it may seem peculiar that once in three months a new minister walks into the pulpit and preaches, not by invitation, but by right; announcing in advance the date of his coming, and requiring, if he pleases, conformity with his plan;

sitting down with the Official Board, and asking all manner of questions, as, "How much has been received for the support of the ministry during the quarter? Are the Church records properly kept? Have the General Rules been read?" etc. No Churches but ours and our sister Methodist Churches, have any such official as a presiding elder. Let us see who this functionary is, and what he does.

Each Annual Conference is divided into several districts, proportionate to the requirements of the work. Where railways are numerous, population is abundant, and Churches are not far apart, the district may embrace a large number of Churches, yet not include much territory, as the New York District, one of the most important in the Church, having seventy appointments, and more property than any other district in the Church, yet consisting of a narrow strip beside the Hudson River. Then, on the

other hand, a few years ago there was in Texas a district eight hundred miles long and six hundred miles wide, yet it contained only sixteen charges.

Over this district, large or small, is placed a presiding elder. He is appointed by the bishop, without the advice or consent of any other person or assembly. A minister may receive an "invitation" to a Church, but a presiding elder is never called to his district. We heard once of a ballot taken among the preachers to nominate a presiding elder, but it was noticed at the next Conference that the bishop did not appoint the man who had received a majority of the votes. Often the first information of the choice to a presiding eldership, both to the appointee and the Conference, comes with the reading of the appointments.

The presiding elder is appointed for one year from the close of the Annual Conference, but the next bishop may reappoint

him; and by successive annual reappointments he may remain in charge of the same district for six years. He may then be appointed to another district, where, in the same way he may serve six years longer, or he may be placed in charge of a Church. A few men, possessing peculiar gifts of administration, have remained in the office of presiding elder through a series of terms upon different districts. Peter Cartwright, one of the old pioneers in what is now the Middle West, was a presiding elder for nearly half a century, but generally two terms, not on the same district, form the limit of service.

At the Annual Conference the most important responsibility of the presiding elder is in the council, popularly known as "the cabinet," though that term is nowhere employed in the Discipline. The presiding elders form a group with which the bishop advises concerning the fixing of the appointments. The bishop may take the advice of

the cabinet as a whole, or of any member in it, or he may obtain advice from without (it comes generally without the asking), or he may construct the plan entirely out of his own head, for the bishop has all the power in the business. But it is generally presumed that the presiding elder has some influence, for both the Churches and the ministers are officially represented by him. During the session of the Conference, and for some time before it, the presiding elder is quite an important personage, for the destiny of many men and many Churches may depend upon his judgment.

During the Conference year the presiding elder travels throughout his district. If he is a routine man, with no aim except to have an easy time and to let others have one also, he contents himself with a quarterly visitation of the charges, and only asks the questions laid down on the program of the Quarterly Conference. Such elders may

have been once, and the tradition is that such there were; but the presiding elder of this generation is generally a live man, looking after his district, and with all his might pushing forward its interests.

It is his business to see that a Church is planted in every new field where one is needed and can be maintained. Other denominations leave their members to take the initiative in the starting of new Churches; but among us there is a man with a lantern looking out for dark places where the gospel is needed, and sending men to occupy them. It is said that in the Dakotas the presiding elders ride on the cowcatcher of the engine, in order to arrive early at the new settlements; but this statement is not generally credited.

Wherever in these new fields a little Church can be established, the presiding elder looks up the land company, and obtains a corner lot. Then he writes to the Church Extension

Society in Philadelphia for a grant and a loan upon a church that is to be builded; also to the Sunday-school Union in New York for a grant of books and lesson helps in a new Sunday-school; and also to the Missionary Society for help on a preacher's support. With the promise of all these he stirs up the settlers, starts a Sunday-school and a Church, and sends it a "supply preacher;" that is, a young man not yet in the Conference, but working under the appointment of the presiding elder.

With the large and strong Churches on his district the presiding elder has less to do than with the small and weak ones; yet even with these his work is more important than it appears to be. He comes once in each quarter, preaches, presides at the Quarterly Conference, and perhaps holds a love-feast. At the Quarterly Conference all the officials of the local Church are gathered, and the elder asks a series of questions, all printed in the

Discipline. (See Paragraph 99, edition of 1900.) These questions bring up for review all the business of the Church, even to the inquiry how many copies of Christian Advocate are taken, and by whom. Written reports are read by the pastor, the superintendent of the Sunday-school, the president of the Epworth League, the trustees, the local preachers, and the class-leaders. The financial statement is presented, showing how much has been raised for salaries of bishops, presiding elder, and pastor; whether the salaries are in arrears, and what can be done to bring them up; how much has been raised for "wornout preachers" and for the general benevolent contributions of the Church. When the Conference adjourns, its record shows precisely the condition of the Church.

As long as the machinery of the local Church moves smoothly, the hand of the presiding elder is scarcely felt. If the bills are paid, the benevolent contributions are raised,

the pastor is at peace with his people, and the work goes on in a satisfactory way, the presiding elder may seem to be in the background. But when trouble comes he is at the front, and, if need be, with the strong hand of authority. If the preacher's salary is behindhand, he stirs up the Church; if the benevolences are in danger of being neglected, he brings them to notice; if the pastor is taken ill or dies suddenly, he is the preacher in charge until the pulpit is supplied.

Ministers are but men, and they are not always wise, nor are they always good. It is necessary that there should be some authority able to take a Church out of the hand of an unworthy person. A minister may be accused of evil conduct or of disloyal teaching; and in such a condition he should not preach until his case has been investigated and his character cleared. The presiding elder may, if necessary, suspend him while such an in-

quiry is in progress. Such a power as this requires great discretion in its exercise; but there are times (let us be thankful that they are rare) when the interests of the Church justify and demand it.

Less than a generation ago one of the most prominent ministers in America—not of our Church—was on trial for six months in a civil court under the gravest of accusations touching his moral character. During all the trial he preached in his own pulpit, only a few squares from the courtroom. There was no power to stop his preaching, or, if he had been found guilty, to depose him, so long as a majority of the congregation were his friends. Such a condition could never arise in a Methodist Episcopal Church.

The presiding elder is the balance-wheel in the Methodist machine, to correct disturbances, and to keep the clock in running order. He is the connecting link between the local and the general Church, holding both to-

gether. He is the commodore or admiral of the fleet, watching the whole field of engagement. He is the pastor over the pastors, the colonel of the regiment, in which each preacher is a captain.

XIX.

THE METHODIST EPISCOPACY.

OURS is an episcopal Church; and if it chose to call itself "The Episcopal Church," it would have a better right to the title than any other denomination; for it was the earliest episcopal Church organized in this country, and, reckoning together all the branches of Methodism, it is about eight times as large as any other Protestant episcopal Church on this continent. But the men who organized our Church as a distinct institution at the famous Christmas Conference in 1784, gave it the name "Methodist Episcopal," meaning thereby that it was, as it still is, the Methodist branch in the episcopal family of Churches.

The word "episcopal" is only a slight

change in the Greek word *episcopos*, which is found in five places in the New Testament; namely, Acts xx, 28; Phil. i, 1; 1 Tim. iii, 2; Tit. i, 7; 1 Pet. ii, 25. In the first of these references it is translated, in the Old Version, "overseers," though the Revised Version gives the rendering there, as in all the other places, "bishops." In fact, the word "bishop" is only a modern form of the Greek word *episcopos*. An episcopal Church, then, is a Church having bishops; and "episcopacy" is a government through bishops. As we have bishops for our chief pastors and highest officers, ours is properly an episcopal Church. But the Methodist Episcopacy differs from all other forms of government by bishops; and a Methodist bishop is unlike any other bishop upon the face of the earth.

The Protestant Episcopalian and the Roman Catholic believe that there are by Divine appointment three distinct orders of ministers: bishops, priests (or presbyters),

and deacons. "Priest" and "presbyter" are, in origin, the same word, meaning "elder." As John Milton wrote, "'Presbyter' is but 'priest' writ large." In our Church we do not attach great importance to the question of orders in the ministry; but we hold that, whatever may be the distinction between them, there are but two orders: presbyters, or elders, and deacons. We do not use the term "priest" on account of its "High Church" associations, preferring "presbyter," and in our Discipline translating it into the English word "elder." According to our doctrine, a bishop does not belong to an order above the other clergy, nor does he rule over the Church by a Divine authority. He is an elder set apart to a certain office, and possessing only the authority which the Church bestows upon him.

In accordance with this view, the General Conference, which is the lawmaking body in our Church, constitutes some of our bishops

“general superintendents,” and gives them authority, within clearly-defined limits, over the whole Church; and it calls others “missionary bishops,” with jurisdiction limited to the districts assigned to them severally, whether India or Africa. There are eighteen general superintendents: sixteen at this date (1902) in active service, and two retired on account of age; and three missionary bishops. In this article our reference is to the bishops who are general superintendents, and not to the missionary bishops.

Our bishops are elected by the whole Church, through its representatives, in General Conference assembled. In other Churches a bishop is chosen by the “diocese,” which would be equivalent to our Annual Conference; and his authority is limited to his field; but among us all our bishops collectively have supervision over the work of the entire Church. The delegates from India, China, and Africa, no matter what

may be their race, or color, or language, have the same voice with those from the United States in the election of bishops.

At the General Conference the question is first decided as to how many bishops will be needed to take the places of those who have died or have been retired, and to provide for the enlargement of the work. Often only two bishops have been chosen; sometimes four or five; and in 1872 eight bishops were added. When the day comes for the election, there is the deepest interest; but no speeches are given in behalf of candidates, and not even nominations are made. After prayer the ballot is taken in silence, except for the calling of the roll; and a vote of two-thirds of those present is required for an election. When the new bishops have been chosen, a day is set for the service of consecration; and from that hour the men solemnly set apart are bishops for life.

We are not to suppose, however, that there

have been no candidates and no consultations. The most important work of the General Conference is the election of bishops; and for years before the vote is taken, throughout the Church, names have been canvassed and relative merits weighed. It would be almost safe to say that if three Methodist preachers pass an hour together at any time within six months of an approaching General Conference, somebody will be talked of as a candidate for bishop. As a result of this general discussion the bishops are carefully selected; and in more than a century, since the beginning of our history as a Church, no man chosen for bishop has shown himself unworthy of his high trust. One man, Wilbur Fisk, declined after election to accept the office; another, Bishop Hamline, after four years, resigned it on account of impaired health; but no bishop of our Church was ever deposed from his position for crime or incapacity.

Twice a year the bishops meet in what is called "the Bishops' Conference." At the fall meeting they divide among themselves the Conferences assembling in the spring; and in the spring they apportion the Conferences meeting in the fall. And from the hour of his appointment, for one year, each bishop is in charge of all the Conferences to which he has been assigned. Thus in the year eighteen bishops carve up the whole world among themselves, except certain missionary jurisdictions, and then go forth to administer it. The next year they meet and carve nearly all of it again. The exception is that a bishop now stays four years in charge of China, Korea, and Japan, and another bishop stays four years in Europe. But in Europe, one year in the quadrennium, another bishop takes his place, and he in turn takes Conferences in the United States. And even in India and Malaysia the bishops from America send one of their number to preside over the

Conferences once in each period of four years. Twenty-one men manage a Church as wide as the world, and sixteen of them change their areas of control every year. That is quite like the early days when twelve apostles went out into all the world, and directed the Churches. In the spirit and in the methods of its episcopacy, Methodism is in the apostolical succession.

The Conferences over which a bishop has charge for a year are not often contiguous to each other. The bishops do not cut the earth into segments, as one would divide an apple pie. Generally the neighboring Conferences need to meet at the same time, and hence must have different bishops. Nor do the Conferences have any relation to the bishop's residence. His home may be in Minneapolis, while his Conferences may begin with Alabama and extend to Maine via Kansas.

Once I was seated at a table when a minister of another denomination said to one of

our bishops, "Bishop Peck, where is your diocese located?" The bishop, who weighed about three hundred and fifty pounds, took in a big breath of air, and then said: "For the present year I have charge of Florida, North and South Carolina, parts of Pennsylvania and Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Dakota, Idaho, all our German Churches on the Pacific Slope, and the empire of Japan." My Presbyterian friend listened to the list with wide-opened eyes, and evidently supposed that the bishop was built on a pattern to fit the amplitude of his field.

At the Annual Conference the bishop presides; but he is more than a presiding officer. He can rule out a motion, without allowing appeal from his decision, if he considers it contrary to the Constitution of the Church. He may take up the business in any order that pleases him, because there are certain duties of the Conference which must be attended to at certain times.

But the greatest power of the bishop is in fixing the appointments of the preachers. He can send any preacher in the Conference to any charge that he (the bishop) may choose; and the preacher must go, or resign. He can send notice to a preacher that he has been transferred from his own Conference to one three thousand miles distant, and neither preacher nor Conference can resist his authority. He can take the advice of the presiding elders in the Cabinet with regard to stationing the preachers, or he can reject it. He can remand every presiding elder in the Conference back to the pastorate, and can appoint a new set of elders.

Yet the Methodist preachers do not tremble as they think of the power which this bishop, "clad in a brief authority," can wield over them; for they know that he has no reason to be tyrannical, and has every reason to be careful. He must place every man somewhere; and he desires to place each man

where he can be of the greatest service to the Church; and that is the best place for any man. No one doubts that the bishop, with all the light at his command, will arrange the ministers and the appointments better than the arrangement would be if each scrambled for his own place.

The bishop, as the appointing power, is removed from the influence of local jealousies and partialities. He has no reason to be any one man's friend or another man's enemy. He has nothing to gain by opposing one, and nothing to lose by favoring another. If he were elected by the votes of an Annual Conference, he would be under some obligation to those who had elected him; but, coming as the representative of the whole Church, and chosen for life, he is independent of all, and can afford to be just toward all. And if the bishop at one session of the Conference makes a mistake, after only one year another bishop will have the opportunity to undo the error.

There is one authority in the Church above

that of the bishops, and to which every bishop is responsible. That supreme authority is the General Conference, which elects bishops, establishes the bounds of their rule, assigns their residences, and holds them to strict account. In the General Conference a bishop presides, but no bishop can vote, nor make a speech, unless asked to do so by the Conference. He can not even answer to an open attack upon his conduct, but must sit still. The humblest preacher in the Church can make complaint to the General Conference against any bishop who has seemed to do him wrong, and his complaint will be investigated by an important committee. By vote of the General Conference the bishop can be censured, or even deposed, if necessary. But as yet deposition or severe censure has never been passed upon a bishop in our Church; and in fact few serious complaints have been made against the administration of any bishop.

A bishop is the only official in the Church

who holds his appointment for life. The term of the pastor in any Church may end at the Annual Conference; that of the editor and the secretary is limited by quadrennial election; but the bishop remains a bishop while he lives. Elected by the entire Church, belonging to no Conference or section, with nothing above them to awaken ambition, and secure in a life position, the bishops have thus far shown themselves the loyal servants of the Church, faithful to the trust reposed in them.

XX.

THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

THE Annual Conference is an institution peculiar to Methodism. No gathering in any other denomination is like it. A Methodist Conference can not be compared with the meeting of a presbytery, or of a classis, or of a Convention; for the work it does and the interest it excites are both unlike those of any other body.

When it comes, there is a stir in the community. For a week the people keep open house, and entertain the preachers, who are in evidence everywhere. By day and by night a crowd seems to be in and around the church where the Conference is held. The visiting ministers take possession of all the other churches, holding anniversaries every even-

ing and preaching in their pulpits on Sunday. The exercises and the accompaniments seem to have a peculiar attraction, not only to the ministers, but to the laity. From all the area of the Conference men will be seen getting off trains: some portly, gold-spectacled gentlemen who have left offices and counting-rooms, others farmers in heavy boots; and all are inquiring for the house where "the bishop is putting up." In the Conference-room a glance around the galleries will show the same faces at every session, year after year, of men and women who never fail in attendance at the Annual Conference.

A stranger looking down upon a Conference for the first time is apt to find the scene bewildering. On the platform sits, as presiding officer, a bishop, who may have come halfway across the continent to attend the session, and may have landed from his train ten minutes before the opening, not knowing half a dozen men in the throng before him.

By his side sits the secretary, with three or four assistants at hand, and piles of papers before him. He quietly prompts the bishop with the names of the men who are so constantly popping up and calling out, "Mr. President!" The space in and around the altar rail is taken up with a row of tables, at which sit the statistical secretary and the treasurer, with their assistants, likewise the everywhere-present (not to say all-wise) reporters. On the front seats are a number of men who seem to be dividing their attention between the bishops, the business, and the button-holing laymen at their ears. Those are the presiding elders, and they are not having an idle time.

In the program things sacred and secular seem to jostle each other; questions are taken up in a peculiar fashion; speeches on widely differing subjects follow in close succession; the presiding officer fixes "the order of the day" to suit himself; in the middle of a de-

bate some one starts a hymn, and everybody sings it with a will; and sometimes several kinds of business seem to be going on at once. Yet there is a definite plan to a Conference session, and the apparent confusion is order to one who understands it. Let us see what are the purposes and plans of the Annual Conference:

The first business for which the Conference is held is "the examination of character." Every minister in the Church is brought to an annual account as to his character and fitness for the work of the ministry. During the first century of Methodist Conference sessions each man went out of the room as his name was called, leaving his brethren to discuss his character and pass a vote upon it. The names are still called in open Conference, but the preachers in regular standing are no longer expected to retire, and the presiding elder answers for each name upon his list with the words, "Nothing against him," if no

charges have been presented. The presiding elder's assurance takes the place of a vote, except in cases where a doubt has been expressed to the elder in advance; and then a Committee of Examination is appointed. Before the Conference adjourns, every preacher who is to receive an appointment must have his character approved. If his case has not been settled, he must be left without a charge. It is a noteworthy fact that every year at least seventeen thousand ministers of our Church pass the ordeal of this examination of character.

A second important business of the Annual Conference is to receive new ministers as the work needs re-enforcement. In a Church which proposes to find employment for all its ministers great care must be exercised with regard to both quantity and quality in the additions to the force. If too many men are received, it will be impossible to place all the members; if too few, some Churches

must be left without pastors. In order to strike an exact balance between supply and demand, it is now customary in the large Conferences to ask the presiding elders how many men, in their judgment, will be needed; then to vote upon the number to be received, and then to have a committee on Conference qualifications, or some equivalent title, to select who among the numerous applicants are the most desirable.

Then, too, the probationary system is universal in the reception of ministers. A young man is "received on trial," and stays on trial for two years, pursuing a course of study, each year passing examination, reported on by his presiding elder, by the examining committee, often by the committee on Conference qualifications also, and finally by vote of the entire Conference. After two years of this sifting process he may be "received in full" by the Conference. But his probation is not yet over; for he has two

more years of study, of examination, and of advancement by vote, until at last he passes from "the class of the fourth year" into the body of approved and accepted members. All these classes, examinations, and reports, with the discussions and votes of the Conference upon the young men concerned, occupy a large part of the Conference session.

The next business of the Conference relates to the reception of reports and contributions. The Conference is at once a census-office and a bank. Each pastor is required to present full and exact statistics of his charge, embracing many items. These are collected, tabulated, figured up, reported, and published by the statistical secretary and his assistants. The preacher must make no mistakes in his reports or the order of their items. What is the effect upon the tabulated columns one may imagine when the pastor gets mixed the value of his church

property and the number of parsonages, and announces that on his charge are 15,000 parsonages, and that the church property is worth one dollar; instead of "church property, \$15,000; number of parsonages, 1." Also, the pastor brings to the Conference, and hands over to the treasurer, all the benevolent contributions of his Church for missions, Church Extension, Tract, Bible, Sunday-school, and sundry other enterprises. These he must present, or vouchers for them, if the money has been already forwarded to the several societies. And the funds or vouchers given to the Conference treasurer must tally exactly with the reports handed to the statistical secretary. To keep the accounts of his Church straight in all these financial and statistical items is not easy for the preacher who has been trained in a college and not in a counting-room. There are some men mighty in the pulpit to whom the statistics are forever an inscrutable

mystery; and great anguish do they bring to the secretary and the treasurer of the Conference.

The fourth department of Conference work, to many at each session the all-important department, is that of "stationing the preachers," or "fixing the appointments." There is a list of two hundred men, and there is a list of two hundred charges. To fit these so that they will hold together, even for one year, is a work requiring skill and practice. And it is wrought by a bishop who, when he arrives, does not know one-tenth of the men and has not seen one-twentieth of the Churches. To aid him in this process, which must be finished in less than a week, he has the advice of the presiding elders in Cabinet session, that of such preachers as he may ask or who may proffer their suggestions, and the additional counsel of multitudinous committees of laymen from the Churches. The list is changed from day to day, but

never officially announced until the last item of the Conference business has been completed; and up to the final moment it may be revised once more. Bishops have been known to make important changes in the scheme of appointments only five minutes before the reading. Yet the preachers whose fate hangs in the balance are, for the most part, happy, because they know what they could not know in the changes of other Churches; namely, that for every man there will be a place provided.

In addition to these Disciplinary duties laid upon the Conference there are functions which have become so general as to appear necessary—such as the reports of committees, the anniversaries, and the visits—sometimes a visitation indeed—by official representatives of various enterprises. The Conference appoints committees upon many questions. These committees meet and prepare resolutions, and the resolutions are often discussed

vigorously when brought to the Conference for adoption. But it must be remembered that the Annual Conference can not make laws, even for its own field. The lawmaking body of the Church is the General Conference, and the resolutions of the Annual Conference express its sentiments only, without the authority of a command either to ministers or to Churches.

At each session the great connectional societies of the Church—Missionary, Church Extension, Sunday-school, Education, and other organizations—expect to hold public meetings, which they call “anniversaries.” These anniversaries fill the afternoons and evenings, as the business sessions occupy the mornings of the annual meeting.

Much time is taken up at the Conference session by the visits and addresses of officials. The custom has grown up for each of the great benevolent societies of the Church to send to the Annual Conference a representa-

tive who shall state its work and present its claim. To these have been added all the editors, college presidents, and other prominent officers of Church institutions, and finally an army of men who are pleading in behalf of needy Churches or missions or institutions. Some of these visits are useful; others are useless; some of the speakers are entertaining, others instructive, and still others dull. Some of the Conferences patiently listen to all the visitors, others assign a time-limit of ten minutes; and in some Conferences there is a committee which must give consent before any except official representatives of the connectional interests can address the Conference. Few would like to abolish this part of the program; but everybody feels that it needs some regulating, especially in the larger Conferences, to which all the agents flock for opportunities of giving addresses.

The Conference opens at nine o'clock gen-

erally on Wednesday morning. The bishop enters the pulpit, calls around him the presiding elders and an aged minister or two, and conducts simple religious exercises. The holy communion generally follows, a service full of fervency, with verses sung here and there through the exercises in strong chorus. Then the elements of the communion are removed, and a number of tables are brought in for the needs of secretaries and reporters. The secretary of the last session comes forward at the request of the bishop, and calls the roll of the Conference, pausing a moment at the names of any who have died during the year. The officers of the Conference—secretaries and treasurer—are chosen; standing committees are chosen, generally on nomination of the presiding elders; “the bar of the Conference” is fixed, within which each member must sit while voting, and other preliminary matters are arranged.

The work of the Conference opens generally with Question 20, "The examination of character," under which the bishop calls upon one of the presiding elders, whose district happens to be first in alphabetical order. "Anything against him?" asks the bishop. "Nothing against him," answer three or four voices; and then the presiding elder reads his report of the district. Afterward the names of his preachers are called in the order of charges. "Nothing against him," the elder responds to each name, and the preacher makes his report of benevolent contributions. The examination of character, varied by the speeches of visiting officials, may occupy two morning sessions.

On Friday morning the bishop calls forward the young men who have been two years "on trial" for membership, and gives them an address in the form of a charge. This episcopal address has of late risen to prominence in the program of the Conference.

The election to orders, the reports of the examining committees, the reception of members into full connection with the Conference, and the advancing of the classes, with incidental matters, and more addresses by officials, fill up the Friday and Saturday sessions.

On Sunday morning the Conference love-feast is held, always a stirring service, with many testimonies. At half-past ten the bishop preaches and the deacons are ordained. In the afternoon another sermon is followed by the ordination of elders. Some of the bishops now conduct both the ordination services in the afternoon, without a sermon. In the evening another preaching service, or the missionary anniversary, is held.

On Monday the business of a large Conference with many visitors becomes crowded, and an afternoon session is held, perhaps an evening session also. On this day the reports of the committees are received, debated, and

adopted. The smaller Conferences close on Monday; the larger are kept busy by "the speaking committee"—i. e., the brethren who like to make speeches—until Tuesday.

When the last item on the secretary's table has been disposed of, the minutes are read, and then over the house, at this hour generally crowded, there is a hush as the bishop rises, with the manuscript of "the appointments" in his hand. That is a moment of feverish excitement to many; for any preacher in the body may find himself sent by that bishop to a new and strange field. The bishop generally offers a short address, gives out a hymn, and calls for a prayer before reading the list. When he begins his reading, one could almost hear a pin drop, so deep is the silence. A surprise among the announcements will send a little buzz through the audience; and once or twice in a lifetime—not oftener—a preacher has been known to rise and object to his appointment. But

in general the decision is final and is measurably satisfactory. At the end, "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow" resounds from the congregation, the bishop bestows the benediction, and the Annual Conference is ended.

XXI.

THE GENERAL CONFERENCE.

ONCE in four years there comes a great stir throughout the Methodist Episcopal Church in every quarter of the globe over the meeting of the General Conference. It is held in the month of May, on every leap-year, which is likewise the year of the Presidential election. For at least a year in advance of its coming it is the subject of general thought, conversation, and discussion. At every Annual Conference an election is held for delegates to the General Conference; and the membership in the body is a coveted and prized honor. The subjects that are likely to arise, and the reforms to be effected, are discussed in the Church papers; and they are often debated in the Annual Conferences.

And while the official papers preserve a dignified silence concerning the names of men who may be elected to the higher offices of the Church, there is a vigorous canvass going on throughout the Church over the offices and the candidates.

The Conference convenes in one of the largest buildings of one of the most important cities of the Union, as in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York or the Auditorium in Chicago. It opens on the first Wednesday of May, and it closes near the end of the month. It has a membership of about seven hundred and fifty delegates, with twice as many visitors and interested parties.

The members of the General Conference are of two orders: ministers and laymen. Originally all the members were ministers, and it was only after a long struggle that laymen were admitted in 1872. Until 1900, not more than two laymen could be sent from

one Annual Conference, but in that year the two orders were equalized, and now as many laymen as ministers are members. The largest Conferences have from twelve to sixteen representatives, the smallest two, one layman and one minister.

The ministerial members are elected at the Annual Conference preceding the meeting of the General Conference, on the ratio of one delegate for every forty-five members, with an additional delegate in case there shall be thirty members above the number as a remainder. That is, a Conference having one hundred and twenty members would be entitled to three members—two on the ratio of one to forty-five and one additional on account of the large fraction of thirty remaining. But if an Annual Conference is as small as twenty members, it is still entitled to one ministerial and one lay delegate. The lay delegates, of an equal number with the ministers, are chosen at a Lay Conference, held

during the session of the Annual Conference, and consisting of one delegate elected by each Quarterly Conference within the bounds of the Annual Conference.

The bishops preside at the General Conference in order of seniority, each a day in turn; but they can not take part in the debate, except when asked to speak (which is not often), nor can they vote, nor have they any representation, as they are not members of any Annual Conference. The bishops make admirable presiding officers, especially the older ones; for they know all the members from their experience among the Annual Conferences; and they know, too, all the parliamentary rules, and are a match for the sharpest debaters on a point of order.

There is scarcely any act in the government of the Church which the General Conference can not do. It is the most autocratic body to be found in any Church, uniting in itself the executive, the legislative, and judicial func-

tions; that is, appointing men to office, making the laws, and acting as a supreme court. Except in a few particulars, which are known as "the six Restrictive Rules" (in Paragraph 67 of the Discipline of 1900), the General Conference can, if it chooses, reconstruct the whole system of the Church. And if a spectator were to judge from the petitions brought to its notice, from the propositions offered, and from some of the speeches made, he might suppose that it was about to take to pieces our entire machinery and reconstruct it after a new pattern. But upon the whole the General Conference is a conservative body. The opinions of one section are balanced by those of another; and after the amendments have been laid on the table and the roar of debate has subsided, the Discipline and the Church emerge from the General Conference not unlike what they were before it met.

A young minister once made a speech in

his Annual Conference, showing the changes that were absolutely necessary to bring Methodism up to the times. His ideas were radical; and they were set forth with such ability that on the next day he was elected a delegate to the General Conference. But his constituents looked in vain through the reports to read his fiery speeches to the General Conference in advocacy of the reforms for which he had pleaded at home. He proved to be a quiet member, taking little part in debate, and conservative in his voting. When asked afterward why he had not done more in the cause of reform, he answered:

“I found it a serious business to tinker a machine as big as ours. Behind me sat delegates from India, at one side were those from Oregon, on the other those from Texas, and across the aisle were representatives from Sweden. One needs to move slowly in changing a system that has its arms around the world.”

The method of working in the General Conference does not promote hasty action. Every subject, petition, and proposition must be referred to one of the "standing committees," unless it be sufficiently important to have a committee especially chosen for its consideration. Each standing committee consists of one minister and one layman from every Annual Conference, so that the committee itself consists of two hundred and fifty members. Every proposed change in the Discipline goes to the committee on Revisals; everything pertaining to the bishops to the committee on Episcopacy; matters belonging to missions to the committee on Missions, and so on. In the committee the subject is discussed, and a recommendation is made regarding it to the General Conference. There it is again talked over, amended, placed into a final form, and at last voted upon. Every proposition is sure to be sifted thoroughly before it becomes a part of the Church's law.

The first business of the General Conference is to inspect the work done throughout the Church during the four years before its session. The minutes of all the Annual Conferences are examined by a committee, and a report is rendered with regard to their accuracy and completeness. The work of the bishops is reviewed, every complaint against them is examined, and any one of them may be (though he rarely is) censured for maladministration. And if the committee on Episcopacy presents a report adverse to a bishop, any member of the Conference can speak upon it, in favor or against; but the bishop must sit silent; for he has no voice in the General Conference. The business and methods of the Book Concern are investigated by a committee, and through their report by the General Conference. Until recently every preacher could appeal from an adverse verdict of his Annual Conference to the General Conference, and have his case

reviewed; but the appeals grew so numerous that some years ago "triers of appeals," consisting of members of Conferences adjacent to the appellant, were ordered to save the time of the General Conference and to avoid delay in the final decision.

The General Conference is the final court in the interpretation of Church law. It gives its decisions concerning the meaning of statutes or the relations of officers in the Church; for example, one General Conference held a thorough debate on the precise difference between a "general superintendent," or bishop, and a "missionary bishop," and on the relations between the two officers, which had been an unsettled question for a number of years and had caused, it is said, a slight friction between the two classes of bishops.

The General Conference not only interprets the laws of the Church; it is the only body in the Church with a right to make laws. It alone decides what changes are to

be made in the Book of Discipline, that little volume which seems to stand next to the Bible as an authority in our Church; though unlike the Bible, it is revised every four years. But until the next General Conference takes the Discipline in hand, every member, every preacher, and every bishop is expected to conform to its regulations. In the Congregational and Baptist denominations no council can overrule the will of a single Church. Among the Presbyterians, the deliverances of the General Assembly must be approved by the presbyteries before they become law. But a Methodist General Conference can enact such laws as it chooses, except as limited in the six Restrictive Rules; and those are requirements that nobody wishes to alter—such as the “Articles of Religion” and the “General Rules.”

But that which more than its lawmaking and lawinterpreting authority makes the General Conference a mighty body, is its

elections. It dispenses an amount of patronage greater far than that of any other assembly on the earth. It elects all the bishops, the secretaries of the benevolent societies, the editors of the Church periodicals, and the publishing agents of the Book Concerns. A General Conference has elected at one session twenty-eight salaried officials, whose aggregate salary was over one hundred thousand dollars annually. Besides these "General Conference Officers"—a term applied to every official chosen by the General Conference, whether bishop, editor, or secretary—there are boards in control of great Church institutions—as the Book Committee, which supervises the Book Concerns, with their millions of capital; the Missionary Board, which expends a million and a half of dollars every year; the Church Extension, Education, Sunday-school, and other Boards, charged with the care of great interests—

all are chosen by the General Conference. The appointments and elections which in other Churches are dispersed throughout the Church, and occur at different times, with us are massed in one body, and within a few days. As a result, the General Conference on the eve of the elections becomes a boiling caldron of ecclesiastical politics. Yet a candid scrutiny of the history will not show an instance when the General Conference has elected to office a man unworthy of his position.

That there are possible dangers in the exercise of such great powers as are held by the General Conference can not be denied. But it is also evident that by means of this strong, supreme body the Church is solidified and directed, as it could not be if the powers now gathered in the General Conference were divided among many Conventions, Conferences, and Boards. A secretary can shape the policy of his society with greater influ-

ence, and can come before a Conference with greater weight, because he represents, not a Board, but the whole Church. As long as the Church is abounding in spiritual life, and active in winning souls, the concentration of its authority will multiply its influence for good. If the Spirit forsakes us, our system will become a mere machine, dealing death instead of life. Let every member seek for that consecration which will maintain "the spirit of life in the midst of the wheels."

CHRONOLOGICAL NOTES ON METH- ODISM.

John Wesley born at Epworth, England, June 17, 1703, "old style;" in "new style," June 28, 1703.

Wesley a student at the Charterhouse School, London, 1713 to 1720. At Christ Church College, Oxford, 1720 to 1725.

Wesley ordained a deacon in the Church of England by Bishop Potter, in the Chapel of Christ Church College, Oxford, September 19, 1725. Ordained a priest by the same bishop, September 22, 1728.

Wesley curate at Epworth and Wroote, assisting his father, the rector, August, 1727, to November, 1729.

Wesley elected a Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, March 17, 1726, but did not become a resident Fellow until November

22, 1729. Remained at Lincoln College until October 14, 1735.

The Oxford Club, named by others "Holy Club" and "Methodist Club," established by Charles Wesley (then a student at Christ Church College) and others, about 1728. John Wesley united with it on coming to Oxford as Fellow in 1729, and continued as its leading spirit until 1735.

John Wesley a missionary to Georgia, 1735 to 1737, with Rev. Charles Wesley and two other clergymen, set sail October 14, 1735, and landed in Georgia, February 5, 1736. Returning, left Georgia, December 2, 1737, and landed in England, February 1, 1738.

John Wesley received the witness of the Spirit to his salvation at a meeting in Aldersgate Street, London, May 24, 1738.

The first Methodist societies organized in London and Bristol in 1739. First Methodist chapel built in Bristol in 1739. The Foundry (an old building used many years before as a cannon foundry) purchased by

Mr. Wesley, and made the Methodist headquarters in London in the end of 1739.

Thomas Maxfield, Wesley's first lay assistant and preacher, licensed, 1742.

The Methodist society in Bristol divided into classes, February 15, 1742. Classes organized in London, March, 1742. These were the earliest "class-meetings." Up to this date each Methodist society met as one body.

The first Methodist Annual Conference convened by John Wesley at the Foundry, London, June 25, 1744. Six clergymen and four lay preachers were present. The Wesleyan Methodist Conference has been held annually since that meeting.

The first Methodist preaching in America by Philip Embury in New York and Robert Strawbridge in Maryland in 1766. John Street Church in New York, the first Methodist church in America, dedicated October 30, 1768, by Philip Embury.

Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor

sent by John Wesley to take charge of societies in America, 1769. In 1774 they returned to Great Britain, on account of the impending American Revolution.

Francis Asbury (born August 20, 1745) appointed by John Wesley "general assistant in America" (i. e., assistant to Mr. Wesley in charge of the societies) at the Conference in 1771. Asbury landed in Philadelphia, October 27, 1772. In the minutes of Wesley's Conference in 1771, America was reported as having three hundred and sixteen members.

Thomas Rankin appointed by Mr. Wesley general assistant and superintendent of American societies in 1772. He arrived in 1773, and, being older than Mr. Asbury, and of longer experience in the work as a preacher and member of Mr. Wesley's Conference, he took precedence over Mr. Asbury. He remained until the spring of 1778, when, on account of the Revolutionary War,

he returned to England, leaving Mr. Asbury in sole control.

First Methodist Conference in America held in Philadelphia, July 14, 1773, by Thomas Rankin and Francis Asbury. Ten preachers were present, none of them ordained. Membership in the societies, about eleven hundred.

Rev. Dr. Thomas Coke, already a priest or presbyter in the Church of England, ordained by John Wesley as "superintendent" of his societies in the United States, September 2, 1784, at Bristol, England. The service for the consecration of a bishop was used, but the title "superintendent," having the same meaning, was given. Dr. Coke also received authority from Mr. Wesley to ordain Francis Asbury to the same office.

Superintendent, or Bishop, Coke, with Rev. Richard Whatcoat and Rev. Thomas Vasey (both of whom Mr. Wesley had ordained on September 1, 1784, as deacons,

and on September 2 as elders) landed in New York, November 3, 1784.

“The Christmas Conference” opened at Baltimore, in the Lovely Lane Chapel, Friday, December 24, 1784. At this Conference the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized. Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury were elected “superintendents.” The consecration of Coke by Wesley was recognized, and Francis Asbury was consecrated “superintendent” by Thomas Coke. Twelve of the preachers were ordained, first as deacons, afterward as elders. At that time the Church included eighteen thousand members and one hundred and four itinerant preachers.

The title “bishop,” in place of “superintendent,” appeared first in the minutes of the Conferences in 1787.

The corner-stone of Cokesbury College, the first educational institution of American Methodism, laid by Superintendent, or

Bishop, Coke at Abingdon, Maryland, June 5, 1785. The building was destroyed by fire December 7, 1795.

Bishop Coke embarked for Europe, leaving Bishop Asbury in sole charge of the Methodist Episcopal Church, June 25, 1787.

John Wesley preached his last sermon February 23, 1791. He died in London on March 2, 1791, aged nearly eighty-eight years.

The Book Concern established in Philadelphia by the appointment of Rev. John Dickins as "book steward" in 1789. The Book Concern was removed to New York in 1804. The Western Methodist Book Concern in Cincinnati was authorized by the General Conference of 1820, with Martin Ruter as its first Agent.

The first General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church held in Baltimore, November, 1792, all the ordained elders being regarded as members. The General Con-

ference has been held quadrennially since. The month of meeting was changed from November to May in 1800 on account of an epidemic of yellow fever in the previous autumn.

The first delegated General Conference held in New York, May, 1812. Ratio of representation, one delegate for every five members of an Annual Conference.

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, organized by a Convention meeting in Louisville, May, 1845. The first General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, held in Petersburg, Virginia, May, 1846. Its first bishops were James O. Andrew and Joshua Soule.

Laymen first admitted to membership in the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in May, 1872. At the General Conference of 1900 the number of lay members was for the first time equal to that of the clerical members.

OUTLINE QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW.

I. A FOREWORD TO THE YOUNG METHODIST.

Tell the anecdote of a celebrated statue by a Danish sculptor. Can you mention any other works by this artist? Any facts concerning his life? Any account of this group of statuary?

How does this story of the artist weeping before his statue illustrate the relation between our real life and our ideal life?

What four traits should there be in the ideal character for a young Methodist Christian?

Define each of these four traits.

Can you name a reason why a Methodist, even more than the member of any other Church, should seek to understand the system of his own denomination?

II. THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH.

Repeat the sentence in the Apostles' Creed with regard to the Church.

What is meant by "the holy catholic Church?"

How does it differ from "the Roman Catholic Church?"

Why is the term "catholic" a suitable one to use?

Why is the Church of Christ called "the invisible Church?"

Wherein are those mistaken who claim that their sect is the only true Church of Christ?

What is an "apostolic Church?" How may we know whether any Church is apostolic?

Why are different Churches desirable and useful?

Draw a diagram which will represent "the holy catholic Church" and "the Churches." To which part or parts of this diagram does the Methodist Episcopal Church belong?

III. OUR PLACE AMONG THE CHURCHES.

How are the different denominations wrongly regarded by many in relation to each other and to Christ?

Give two illustrations, showing how they should be regarded.

Is external unity—that of one organization for all Christians—to be desired or sought for?

What are the three principles underlying the different organizations of Churches?

Name Churches alike in doctrine, but differing in method.

Name Churches alike in doctrine, but differing in spirit.

Name Churches differing in doctrine and in method, but alike in spirit.

What are the two names that represent the great division in doctrine between evangelical Churches? Wherein lies the distinction between these two views?

Show the three principal forms of Church

government and the differences between them.

Which of these is the Methodist form of government? Wherein does it differ from that of some other "episcopal" bodies?

What is meant by "the Methodist spirit?"

Name the three traits of Methodism in doctrine, method, and spirit.

Repeat a well-known sentence spoken by Abraham Lincoln concerning the Churches.

IV. THE METHODIST FAMILY.

Wherein is Methodism old?

Wherein is it young?

What is its age, as an organization, compared with some other Churches?

In what year did Methodism begin its history as an organization?

Who were some of the founders of other Churches?

Wherein do these Churches differ, in their relation to their founders, from Methodism?

How many members of Methodist Churches are there? How many people may be reckoned as the spiritual followers of John Wesley?

What is meant by "the Methodist family of Churches?" How many Churches constitute this family?

To what tree might it be compared?

Name the principal branches of Methodism, and give the number of members in each branch.

What have caused these divisions?

What is the relation of these Methodist Churches to each other?

What great gathering indicates this relation?

State in a sentence the three great principles as given by John Wesley.

V. THE METHODIST SYSTEM.

What is meant by "the connectional spirit?"

What is the unit in the Church?

To what does the individual member belong in the Methodist plan?

Why was the class with its leader a necessity in earlier Methodism?

What is meant by "the charge?" How is the charge supervised?

What is the district; and how is it directed?

What is the Annual Conference and its work?

Who presides over the Annual Conference?

What is the highest ruling body in the Methodist Episcopal Church?

How might our system be represented in a diagram?

What are some advantages of our system?

VI. THE FAITH OF OUR FATHERS.

When, where, and under what peculiar circumstances did John Wesley once preach in his native village.

Why was he not permitted to preach in the Church?

State the first of the four great doctrines held by Mr. Wesley and his followers.

State the second doctrine.

State the third doctrine.

State the fourth doctrine.

Why was the proclamation of these truths by John Wesley necessary?

In what four statements concerning salvation, beginning with one letter, may these doctrines be expressed?

Are these doctrines now held by Methodists only?

Why, then, may we still call them "the distinctive doctrines of Methodism?"

VII. THE PORCH OF PROBATION.

What is "a member on probation?"

How is the probationer "on trial?"

Wherein is the probationary system pe-

culiar to Methodism? How is it in spirit recognized by other Churches?

What is required as a prerequisite of one who joins on probation?

What is required during probation?

Why is the probationary period important to the young Christian?

What privileges of Church membership does the probationer enjoy?

What rights does the member enjoy which are denied to the probationer?

How does the probationer become a member in full?

What are some benefits in the probationary system?

VIII. THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

What date might be regarded as the birthday of Methodism?

What is told by Mr. Wesley concerning that day?

Wherein was that experience remarkable in those times?

What events led Mr. Wesley to seek this witness of the Spirit?

Who led him to the knowledge of it?

What was the nature and effect of Mr. Wesley's preaching as a result of this experience?

Are this doctrine and this experience older than Wesley's time?

How may one know that he possesses it?

What differences in its manifestation may appear?

IX. THE HIGHER LIFE.

Tell the story of an old woman who saw the ocean for the first time.

Name some sentences of Scripture pointing to a fullness in righteousness.

What is the definition of justification?

What is sanctification?

What is entire sanctification?

What stages of progress may be noted in the Christian life?

Describe the life of duty.

Describe the higher life of love.

What are some blessings in this higher life?

How may one enter into it?

X. THE GENERAL RULES.

What is the requirement of the Church concerning the General Rules?

What indicates the importance of these Rules in their relation to the Church?

What qualities or aspects of these Rules are apt to strike many readers unfavorably?

To what great documents might these Rules be compared?

By whom, for whom, and under what circumstances were these Rules prepared?

Why were many of these regulations necessary in the early days of Methodism?

What abiding principles stand under these regulations?

How should they be read and interpreted?

XI. THE ARTICLES OF RELIGION.

Wherein are the Articles of Religion of our Church unalterable?

What great distinctive doctrines of our Church are not mentioned in these articles.

What doctrines common to all Christians do they state?

Do these Articles contain statements of "dead issues?"

To what might these Articles be compared, and why?

What allusions to past strifes and controversies may be seen in them?

How were these Articles prepared?

What event in the early history of the United States is recalled by one of these Articles?

XII. THE REQUISITES FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

Why is the hour of full reception into the Church an important time?

What in the way of belief or doctrine is required of the one who is to be received into the Church.

What faith of the heart is also required?

What is the requirement with regard to our system of government and organization as a Church?

What is the requirement with respect to character and conduct?

What is the attitude of our Church regarding certain forms of amusement? Wherein is it different from the attitude of other Churches?

What are the duties of the new member in the support of the Church?

XIII. THE CHURCH OFFICIARY.

For what purpose does the Church of Christ exist in the world?

What is included in "the winning of souls" to Christ?

What is the use of organization in the Church?

What are some of the necessary expenses of the Church?

For what spiritual interests does the pastor need helpers?

What three classes of officers are found in a Methodist Episcopal Church?

What are the duties of leaders?

What are the duties of stewards?

What are the duties of trustees?

How are these three classes of officers chosen?

What is the Official Board?

What is the Quarterly Conference?

Who presides at the Quarterly Conference?

XIV. THE CLASS-MEETING.

How did the Societies originate, out of which Methodism grew?

When and where were these first Societies formed?

By what name were they at first known?

When, where, and under what circumstances was the first division into classes made?

What was the result of this organization into classes?

What was the nature of the class-meeting, as established in early Methodism?

What is a love-feast?

What changes have taken place in the class-meeting system?

Why was the class-meeting in former times more of a necessity than it is now?

What are some benefits in attendance upon the class-meeting?

Wherein is the class-meeting of greater benefit than a "young people's meeting?"

XV. THE LOCAL PREACHER.

Wherein does this age differ from past ages in the work of the laity in the Church?

What denomination in modern times first encouraged the preaching and public speaking of laymen?

Who was the first licensed lay preacher?

When and how did he begin preaching?

What necessity was there at that time for lay preachers?

Who were some of the earliest lay preachers in America?

How did some of these preachers receive ordination?

From whom is every Methodist minister's ordination derived?

What is the difference between "traveling preachers" and "local preachers?"

What is the process through which a local preacher receives license?

What is required of a local preacher?

How may a local preacher receive ordination?

What are local deacons and local elders?

Why were local preachers formerly more necessary than they are at present?

What equivalent to the local ministry is found in other Churches?

XVI. THE PREACHER IN CHARGE.

What are some of the titles by which a pastor is called among other Churches?

What is his title in our Church? What does this title mean?

What difference exists between Methodism and other denominations with regard to the choice and appointment of pastors?

How far may a Church choose its own pastor in our denomination?

For how long a period was the preacher in early times in charge of one congregation?

At what times were changes made in the length of the pastoral term?

For how long is a minister appointed over a Church?

What power of changing a minister's appointment is possessed by the bishop?

Why does the bishop rarely use to the utmost the power intrusted to him?

What fact shows that upon the whole the Churches and the preachers are contented with the present system?

What is expected of a preacher in his relation to his new appointment?

Who is required to pay the moving expenses of the new pastor?

State some of the duties of a preacher in charge in relation to his Church.

What are his duties in relation to other Churches and to the community?

What traits or qualities are needed in a successful minister?

What illustration shows the minister's need of assistance from his people?

XVII. OUR ITINERANT PASTORATE.

How was the itinerant system of Methodism illustrated by an unfriendly critic?

What impression would our method of stationing ministers make upon one unacquainted with its working?

How does the bishop obtain information for the appointment of pastors?

What great advantage in its pastoral arrangements has Methodism over other forms of Church organization?

Wherein is the plan also an advantage to the ministers, as well as to the Churches?

How does the itinerant system give to one Church the varied abilities of different ministers?

How does the system promote unity in our work?

How does it strengthen, rather than weaken, the bond between the pastor and his people?

Are there not possibilities of injustice in our system?

Do they often occur?

Why are they not more frequent?

XVIII. THE PRESIDING ELDER.

How does every Methodist Episcopal Church have three pastors?

Wherein is the office of a presiding elder unique?

What is the district?

Who is in charge of the district, and how is he appointed?

For how long a term is a presiding elder appointed?

How often may he be reappointed to the same district?

What is "the Cabinet?"

Are the decisions of the bishop controlled by the Cabinet?

What is the work of the presiding elder during the Annual Conference?

What is his work through the year?

What does the presiding elder do in new fields?

How often does the presiding elder visit the Churches on his district?

What is his work at the meeting of the Quarterly Conference?

What power does the presiding elder hold with respect to the pastor?

What part in the machinery of a clock may represent the presiding elder?

XIX. THE METHODIST EPISCOPACY.

Why is ours an episcopal Church?

Why might it call itself *the* Episcopal Church in this country?

When was it organized?

What do the words "Methodist Episcopal Church" mean?

From what word is the word "bishop" derived?

What are the three orders in the ministry, considered essential by some Churches?

What is the meaning of the word "priest?"

What word do we prefer for "priest" or "presbyter?"

What is a bishop, according to Methodist view?

What two kinds of bishops are found in our Church?

How are the bishops chosen?

What is the bishops' conference?

How are the Conferences over which any one bishop has jurisdiction arranged?

What is the authority of a bishop at the Annual Conference?

How long does the bishop hold his office?

XX. THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

Why is the Annual Conference a remarkable body?

What is the appearance of the Church when a Conference is in session?

What are some of the purposes for which the Annual Conference is held?

What is "the examination of character," and how is it conducted?

By what process are new members received into the Conference?

Why is the number of ministers to be re-

ceived a more important matter with us than with other Churches?

How are the reports and the contributions received at Conference?

What part does the Conference take in stationing the ministers? Who attends to this work?

What are the reports of committees at the Conference?

Does the action of an Annual Conference have the authority of law in the Church?

What interest do the general officials of the Church—editors, secretaries, etc.—have in the Annual Conference?

What is the general order of exercises in the session of the Annual Conference?

XXI. THE GENERAL CONFERENCE.

How often, and when, is the General Conference held?

Who are the members of the General Conference?

How are the members chosen?

What part do the bishops have in the General Conference?

What authority does the General Conference possess?

Why is the General Conference generally a conservative body?

How is the business of the General Conference carried on?

What are the standing committees?

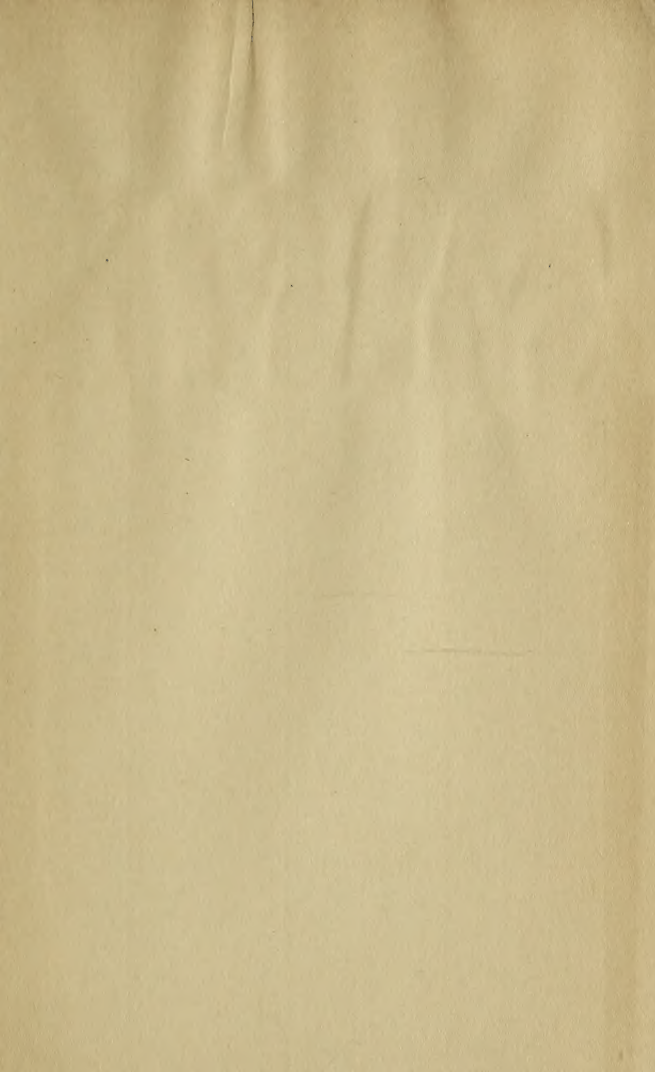
What work of review and inspection is done by the General Conference?

Who are "triers of appeals," and what is their work?

How does the General Conference act as a supreme court?

What officers of the Church are elected by the General Conference?

Wherein is the power exercised by the General Conference a benefit to the Church?



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